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ICONOGRAPHY IN LYDGATE'S "DANCE OF DEATH"

by

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John Lydgate, the "monk of Bury" (c.1375-c.1448), dealt almost entirely with medieval themes in his poetry, themes which one might suppose would no longer interest the modern world; yet when the English poet Auden published his acrid poem *The Dance of Death* in 1933, he was drawing on a motif (likewise used by Lydgate) and sentiment which was so ubiquitous in Western Europe during the fifteenth century that it has been termed the last characteristic gesture of the Middle Ages. The universal truth that all men must die (Jeder Mensch muss sterben), was fashioned at that time into a didactic and compelling theme of peculiar character by the energy of the preachers to stimulate the sinner to repent and mend his ways. The common folk of Western Europe, be they urban or rural, heard and saw (in pictorial representation) continual warning of the pain of Hell and the possible swiftness with which Death could snatch them off, a swiftness that might find them with their sins unconfessed.

The purpose of the present paper is to examine some of the many ideas and influences which contributed to the synthesis of the fully crystallized form of the Dance of Death, or, as it is more usually called, the *danse macabre*. Attention will be focused on Lydgate's Middle English free translation of a French verse rendition, and my general observations will be directed towards the English and French cultural milieu, although a few incidental references will be made to the occurrence of the *danse macabre* motif in other lands.¹

¹ The literature on the subject, especially by German scholars, is enormous. The topic has been attracting American scholars. A recent Chicago dissertation, Henri Stegemeier *The Dance of Death in Folk-Song, With an Introduction on the History of the Dance of Death* (1939), deals mainly with Bavaria, South Austria and Switzerland; a Bryn Mawr dissertation by F. Whyte, *The Dance of Death in Spain and Catalonia* (1931), covers Spanish material; a Columbia dissertation, L. P. Kurtz, *The Dance of Death and the Macabre Spirit in European Literature* (1934), pays considerable attention to France; for Italy, see Pietro

Speaking of French art at the close of the Middle Ages, Lévêque writes: "L'artiste cherche alors à émouvoir par le spectacle de la souffrance, ou à terrifier par la représentation minutieusement cruelle de la morte . . . En tout cas, la douleur et la mort furent, au quinzième siècle, de grandes inspiratrices. C'est alors que l'on imagina de représenter des cadavres en putréfaction, et surtout ces fameuses *Danses macabres*, qui ornaient les murs des églises et des cloîtres. La danse macabre était formée, d'une série de peintures représentant des personnages appartenant à toutes les conditions sociales—roi, évêque, chevalier, moine, bourgeois, jongleur, mendiant, etc.—et chacun de ces personnages était entraîné par un squelette dansant . . . Étrange et sardonique glorification de la Mort, la grande niveleuse, devant qui tous les hommes sont égaux."²

The *danse macabre* is essentially a symbol of man's dying.

The most famous mural painting of the *danse macabre* was in Paris, on the walls of the cemetery of the Holy Innocents, a locale famous as a social rendezvous for all manner of people—tradesfolk, idlers, swindlers and prostitutes.³ This painting is usually dated 1424; but there is a reference in the *Contes et Discours* of N. du Fail (1597) to alchemists frequenting the promenades in the cloisters of St. Innocent, wherein a *danse macabre* was depicted, during the reign of Charles V, who died on the 6th September 1380. The earliest painted *danse macabre* in Europe seems to have been executed at Klingenthal, Little Basel, in 1312, although it is quite possible that other examples have perished. Most of these paintings appear to have been accompanied by verses explaining, enlarging and commenting on the motif.

Vigo *Le Danze Macabre in Italia* (Bergamo, 1901). In 1939, Archer Taylor referred to the "complicated and unsolved problems of the origin and dissemination of the Dance of Death" (*Problems in German Literary History of the Fifteenth & Sixteenth Centuries*, p. 111); and provided useful bibliographical guides in *Modern Philology* XXX (1933) 325-328. E. M. Manasse, "The Dance Motive of the Latin Dance of Death," *Medievalia et Humanistica* (University of Colorado) fasciculus iv (1946) 83-103, has been of great help to me. The etymology of the term *macabre* is still unexplained, although the theory that it is derived from the Arabic *maqbara* (=tomb) has been generally supported; for other theories see Gaston Paris in *Romania*, XXIV (1895) 199-132.

² André Lévêque *Histoire de la Civilisation Française* (1940) 101-102; cf. also J. Vander Heyden, *Het Thema en de Uitbeelding van den Dood in de Poëzie der Late Middeleeuwen en der Vroege Renaissance in de Nederlanden* (Ghent, 1930).

³ J. Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (Eng. trans. 1924) 124-135; É. Mâle, *L'Art Religieux de la Fin du Moyen Age en France* (3rd. ed. 1925) 359-380; B. J. Wyndham Lewis *François Villon* (1928) 45-48.

The motif was also acted. We have definite evidence that a *danse macabre*—perhaps as a masque or pageant, was played at Bruges before Philippe le Bon of Burgundy in 1449. The accounts of the Burgundian dukes, preserved in the Lille archives, record a payment of "viii francs" to a certain Nicaise de Cambray, "painctre" who "a joue devant mondit seigneur, en son hostel, avec ses autres compaignons, certain jeu, histoire et moralité sur le fait de la danse macabre. . . ."⁴ It is quite possible that similar masques, pageants or plays took place in England during the fifteenth century, although no records survive. It has been conjectured that a masque of the Seven Deadly Sins written by William Dunbar (c.1507) was suggested by a similar masque acted before James IV of Scotland on a Shrove Tuesday.⁵ One thing is certain: the *danse macabre* furnished a motif that found representation in many forms. The paintings and woodcuts, however, have been usually regarded as most significant by scholars because they afford the most vivid realization of the import of the theme. Rivalling the Holy Innocent mural mentioned above (no longer extant), there survives a famous mural at the Abbey of Chaise-Dieu in Auvergne.⁶ In England there were murals, no longer extant, at Wortley Hall, Stratford-on-Avon, Croyden, and Hexham Church, Northumberland.

Perhaps the most famous woodcuts were those of Holbein (Basel: 1530), which have been reproduced over a hundred times; and those of Guyot Marchand, made in Paris in 1490 for Geoffroi de Marnef.⁷

II

At some time after his sojourn in Paris in 1426, Lydgate was apparently commissioned by John Carpenter, Town Clerk of London from 1417-1438, to make a translation of the French verses accompanying the *danse macabre* of the Holy Innocents to go with the new Dance of Death painting which was subsequently painted on the walls

⁴ Florence Warren *The Dance of Death* (1931) p. xi; E. K. Chambers *English Literature at the Close of the Middle Ages* (1945) p. 53.

⁵ Frank Heath, in *Truill's Social England* II, sec. ii, 704; R. Withington *English Pageantry* (1918-1920), 2 vol. s.v.

⁶ Warren *op. cit.*, p. 97, lists 22 paintings in Europe, drawing partly on a list provided in Georges Kastner *Danses des Morts* p. 78. Illustrations of the Chaise-Dieu mural are available in Mâle, pp. 372-376.

⁷ See *The Dance of Death printed at Paris in 1490*; a Library of Congress reprint (1945) of the rare Lessing J. Rosenwald copy, with an introduction by William M. Ivins, Jr. The book is described in the *Gesamtkatalog der Wiegendrucke* No. 7957.

of the north cloister of St. Paul's in London.⁸ The date for the painting is usually given as c.1430. The entire icon was called the Dance of Paul's and was well known: Sir Thomas More said that to meditate on it would be "good for the spirit;" and there is a reference to it in *The Demaunde Joyous*.⁹ Stow further records that the whole cloister with its tombs and monuments was pulled down in 1549 at the order of the Duke of Somerset to be converted into a garden for the "Pety Canons."

Lydgate's verses must have been fairly popular since twelve manuscripts survive as well as the printed edition made by Tottel in 1544 as an appendix to his edition of Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*.¹⁰ In this "dance" or procession, Death addresses all classes in hierarchal gradation from Pope to Laborer, thirty-six in all, bidding them follow him; and each personage gives a sad reply.

And being painted on the cloister walls in a favorite gathering place in London, they must have been known to many Londoners. For over a century there was as much business transacted and gossip spread in the famous aisles of Old St. Paul's as there were sermons preached.¹¹ In this respect the secular activities in the cemetery of

⁸ John Stow, *Survey of London* (ed. Kingsford, i, 327). Warren pointedly suggests that Stow's authority for this statement may have been from the tradition preserved in the Trinity College Cambridge MS R. 3.21 copy of Lydgate's *Dance of Death* (or *Daunce of Machabre*, as it is termed therein): these words payntyd in ye cloystar [of St. Paul's] at ye dispensys & request of Jankyn Carpenter.

⁹ Cf. G. G. Coulton, *Social Life in Britain from the Conquest to the Reformation* (1919) p. 410n.

¹⁰ Modern annotated editions of the poem will be found in E. P. Hammond *English Verse from Chaucer to Surrey* (1927), from Bodleian MS Selden supra 53; Florence Warren in *EETS OS* (1931) No. 181, from Ellsmere MS 26/A.13 and Brit. Mus. MS Landsdowne 699. Tottel's text has been reprinted by Dr. Henry Bergen in his edition of Lydgate's *Fall of Princes* (*Short Title Catalogue* No. 3177), part iv, in *EETS ES* (1924) No. 123; this edition contains two significant wood-cuts on p. 1027 and p. 1043 (orig. 160 x 110 mm, 158 x 110 mm), the first depicting a procession of living persons in hierarchal gradation compelled to go on the "dance" by their respective skeleton-cadavers; the second depicting three courtiers solemnly contemplating the dead body of a king recumbent on a sepulchre while elongated worms (or snakes?) feast on his entrails. Cf. E. Hodnell *English Woodcuts 1480-1535* (1935).

¹¹ Cf. details in Bowers *Byrsa Basilica* (Materials for the Study of the Old English Drama, vol. XVII, Louvain, 1939) pp. xxi-xxiii; H. T. Stevenson *Shakespeare's England* (1905) 81-106. Cf. further C. L. Kingsford *Prejudice & Promise in XVth Century England* (1925), p. 140: "The common enlargement of London churchyards about the middle of the fourteenth century may have been due rather to the ravages of the Black Death than to an increase in the number of the inhabitants. But during the fifteenth century, or very soon afterwards, we know that over fifty of the London churches were rebuilt or enlarged. This may have been due in part to the piety of wealthy benefactors, who built chapels whether as burial places or chantries. But in some cases the rebuilding was clearly to supply the increased needs of the parish."

the Holy Innocents in Paris, which Lewis calls a "Ranelegh,"¹² are similar.

III

In listing the various literary antecedents, ideas, motifs, and possible sentiments arising from contemporary social conditions which went into the complicated amalgamation of Lydgate's *Dance of Death*, I would stress that it is impossible to determine, with any satisfactory finality, the relative importance of any one ingredient, or to establish rigid categories of influence. The materials were welded, so to speak, into an artifact, and the final result was in many respects typical rather than unique. What impresses the cultural historian is the sameness, rather than the variations, in the international treatment of characteristic medieval themes. No doubt, a future historian will be appalled by the lack of variation in the thousands of cow-boy motion pictures which have been manufactured in Hollywood during the past two decades.

LITERARY TRADITIONS

(A) The verses of Lydgate are cast in a dialogue form, Death addressing a victim, and the victim responding. However, the wooden dialogue itself is not very dramatic. Lydgate, even if he had so desired, was not capable of being a dramatic writer; he was essentially a narrator, and a translator. Furthermore, in this particular case, he was translating from a French source¹³ as well as being restricted to the exigencies of writing for iconographical purposes—i.e., commenting on the mural painting above the explanatory verses.¹⁴ Lydgate did other work of this nature: his so-called tapestry poems, *The Life of St. George* and *The Fall of the Seven Princes* have been printed by Hammond in *Englische Studien* XLIII (1910); his *Bycorne*

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The dialogue as a literary form has been enormously popular, from the time of Plato on, and its great value has resided in its fitness for the progressive development of ideas through dialectic, as well as for character delineation and revelation.¹⁵ Medieval writers, so fond of disputation, were very fond of this method of literary presentation. Debates between the Body and the Soul, between departed spirits and the living, between Satan and a Christian adversary, are common in medieval Latin and the vernacular tongues, and helped to fix the symbol of personified Death, or the Devil.

(B) *The Vado Mori tradition*. An interesting Latin poem and vernacular poem in twelve distichs, which has survived in several versions, dating from the early part of the 14th century, consists of representatives of the different social classes who repeat in turn the sinister refrain *vado mori*. They are not being summoned by Death, nor are they apparently being addressed by another party. Their attitude is resigned; there is no spirited protest against fate or Fortuna. This literary tradition was widely disseminated; and contained several elements similar to the later *danse macabre* such as the notion that in death all men are equal and the arrangement of representatives of different social classes in gradation, answering to the medieval love of classification. There is no dance motif; and no pictorial representations of the theme are known.¹⁶

(C) *The Three Living and the Three Dead* (*Les Trois Mors et li Trois Vifs*). This legend was popularized in a French metrical work of the late 13th century, which became a favorite theme in mural painting.¹⁷ According to this story, three noble youths (or kings, in older versions) were hunting in a forest when they were intercepted by three hideous images of Death, from whom they hear sententious lectures on the vanity of human endeavor. The significant element in this tradition is the irony and suddenness with which Death confronts young, fortunate members of the privileged class; and the dramatic tension arising from the tragic tone of the encounter.

¹⁵ For a general survey of this literary type in English literature, see E. Merrill *The Dialogue in Eng. Lit.* (Yale Studies in Eng. No. 43); E. N. S. Thompson *The English Moral Plays* (Pub. of the Conn. Academy of Arts & Sciences, xiv); J. E. Wells *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English*, p. 411; Bowers *The Gast of Gy* (Föster's Beiträge zur Eng. Philologie, heft xxxii, 1938) p. 17.

¹⁶ Cf. Stegemeier, 28-29.

¹⁷ For illustrations, see Mâle, pp. 354-8.

Yet, as it has been noted, there is a marked element of clemency in this legend which was seen is not present in the *danse macabre*. It might be noted further that the subjects, the three noble youths, represent but one segment of medieval society; hence the scope of inclusion of all social classes in the *danse macabre* marks an advance in what might be termed the development of a comprehensive, rather than class conscious, attitude. Some of the later versions of this theme, however, do show a development similar to the representation of the lower classes in the *danse macabre*, in that the three kings (or noble youths) become representatives of different estates or even of the lower orders.¹⁸ The dead usually serve as messengers to warn the living to mend their ways to escape the punishments of the other world.

(D) *The Dance*. The interpretation of this element has caused scholars a good deal of trouble. In the first place, there is some ambiguity in the term, because in Middle English the term often means "procession," rather than dancing itself. But that some of the artists and writers who composed *danses* thought of dancing proper is clearly indicated by the second woodcut in Guyot Marchand's 1490 edition of the Dance of Death, where four images of Death are playing musical instruments—a bagpipe, a drum, a pipe, a portable organ (the prototype of the calliope) and a lyre.

Various theories to account for the dance have been advanced. Scholars have frequently pointed out the ancient superstition that the dead danced in cemeteries at night;¹⁹ Warren thought that the clergy had tried to substitute a moral form of dancing for the questionable dancing that often was indulged in by the folk in churchyards;²⁰ Stegemeier reviews a complicated, and tenuous, theory that the notion of dancing in the *danse macabre* may be connected with the notion of some mystics that death was a happy entrance to eternal life, an entrance signalized by happy dancing (*nur ein suzzer durchgank zu dem ewigen leben von diesem werltlichen tode*), and related to the concept of Christ leading a dance of Christians to the grave.²¹

¹⁸ Stegemeier, p. 27.

¹⁹ Cf. J. A. MacCulloch *Med. Faith and Fable* (1932) 90-91, 120, 123; Hoops, *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, s.v. Aberglaube.

²⁰ Warren, *op. cit.*, p. xiii. Her theory seems far fetched. It is quite true, however, that there were frequent fairs, festivities and dancing held in English churchyards; cf. references given by Lucy T. Smith, art. "Town Life" in H. W. C. Davis ed. *Medieval England* (1924) p. 313.

²¹ Stegemeier, p. 20, citing A. Pelzer, *Deutsche Mystik und deutsche Kunst* (Heidelberg diss.; 1899) p. 79.

The most plausible theory has been advanced by Manasse, who sees in it the idea of compulsion, and points to such medieval legends as the Pied Piper of Hamelin wherein a magic compulsion was exerted on people by music. Nobody is able to resist the piping of Death.²²

Dancing is a common phenomenon in all ages. And there are "good" dances as well as "bad" dances. In a comprehensive survey of sacred dancing, Oesterly observes that in dancing at a mourning or burial rite, some notion of propitiatory action "whereby the spirit of the departed is persuaded to refrain from molesting the living" is present.²³

The medieval English preacher, on the whole, seems to have regarded dancing as a form of vanity and to have condemned it roundly. The more decorous and stately procession on formal occasions was certainly preferred. Yet dancing at harvests and feasts was a frequent mode of expressing community joy, and certainly no amount of pulpit denunciation wrought any permanent eradication of this perennial social activity.

In the first woodcut in Tottel's text of Lydgate's *danse macabre* the various figures are walking in a procession rather than dancing. In the Marchand woodcuts, the images of Death usually strike a more animate—some even a coy—posture than the unhappy mortals who are being summoned; but they are not actually dancing.

(E) *The Medieval Drama*. Because of the "dramatic" nature of the *danse macabre* some scholars have conjectured that it had been subjected to a strong influence emanating from the various forms of the religious drama. It is true that in some late English moralities, such as *Everyman*, there is a clear use of what may be termed the Summons-of-Death theme²⁴ and the various warnings of impending end, mixed with the usual admonitions to lead a more virtuous existence. However it is much more likely that both late moral drama and *danse macabres* grew out of the same cultural milieu and from the same basic themes since in most respects they are parallel literary growths. Furthermore, scholars may speak of the many "dramatic" features of medieval preaching which had a "wide influence," but unless the term dramatic is restricted to the presence of actual impersonation,

²² Manasse, p. 91.

²³ W. O. E. Oesterly, *The Sacred Dance* (1923) p. 30.

²⁴ For a recent study of *Everyman*, see Henry de Vocht, *Everyman; A Comparative Study* (Materials for the Study of the Old Eng. Drama, Louvain, 1947, vol. XX); for general survey of the moralities, see W. R. Mackenzie, *The English Moralities from the Point of View of Allegory* (Harvard Stud. in Eng. [1914] No. 2); E. K. Chambers, *The Medieval Stage* (1903) ii, 153-55.

it becomes almost meaningless, or at best a synonym for any form of expressive action or speaking.

(F) *Personified Death*, and the suddenness of his attack. Manasse notes that in the iconographical history of the figure of Death in "Gothic" art, at least three stages of development can be discerned.²⁵ Before that time, Death was overthrown by Christ, sharing his ignominy with Satan, with whom the symbol was often (con)fused.²⁶ Later, about the start of the thirteenth century, Death appears as powerful and triumphant, and more involved in the affairs of the world, and more and more assuming the likeness of what he makes his victims. The end of the development is "the complete identity of the figures of Death and the deceased human being."

In the Marchand woodcuts, the various representations of Death carry different symbolic instruments: a deadly spear, a spade (for grave digging), a scythe.²⁷ Death is often represented as a hunter or fowler in German iconography.²⁸ But throughout, he is regarded with awe and horror, as a deadly enemy, a "privee thief," as he is called in Chaucer's Pardoner's tale, who suddenly strikes down men. This concept of suddenness is very noticeable in Lydgate's poem (sodein tidinges, 1.210; haste of Death, 1.405; sodein stroke, 1.540) and Mâle has argued that this idea is the second main idea in the *danse macabre*. Suddenness, of course, requires no comment.²⁹ In an age where the violent tenor of life and the frequency of deadly

²⁵ Manasse, *op. cit.*, p. 83. Citing W. Molsdorf, *Christliche Symbolik der Mittelalterlichen Kunst* (Leipzig, 1926) pp. 241 ff. See chapt. vi, "The Mythology of Death," in MacCulloch, *op. cit.*, 89-102.

²⁶ These two figures are blended in the Harrowing of Hell theme, taken from the apocryphal book of *Nicodemus*, wherein Christ descends to Hell and liberates the dead (i.e., redeems them): Satan is called *princeps et dux mortis*; he himself boasts of leading the dead to Infernus (Hades) . . . *quos ad te mortuos perduxii*; and is directly called Death: *Tum gloriæ dominus conculcans mortem et comprehendens principem inferorum privavit omni sua potestate* (Manasse, p. 97, citing Tischendorf, *Evangelia Apocrypha* (2nd ed. Leipzig, 1876) pp. 395, 400. Cf. further W. H. Hulme, *The Middle English Harrowing of Hell*, *EETS ES* (1907) No. 100; Karl Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church* (1933) i, 149-177; Paul Piper, *Die Geistliche Dichtung des Mittelalters* (1887-1895) vol. 2; Dürer's woodcut of the theme (from the *Large Passion* of 1510) is reproduced as the frontispiece in A. E. Zucker, *The Redentin Easter Play* (1941).

²⁷ Cf. the interesting chapter on "Father Time" in Panofsky (*op. cit.*) who likewise often carries a death-dealing scythe to symbolize one of his functions. Panofsky traces this concept back to the Roman concept of a cannibalistic Saturn, who as god of agriculture often carried a scythe.

²⁸ Cf. Stegemeier, 13-15.

²⁹ Hamlet's magnificent figure: this fell sergeant, death, / Is strict in his arrest (V, ii. 346) draws on centuries of tradition.

communicable disease was everywhere, the idea of "suddenness" could hardly have been avoided.

Now it is clear that the iconography of Death reflects contemporary thinking. It is remarkable that as far back as in the Old English Salomon and Saturn, Salomon argues in Christian vein that the recitation of the *Pater Noster* will ward off all attacks of the Devil, regardless of what guise he assumes to tempt the unwary.³⁰ This is a common theological position, not unrelated to common incantation in folklore, throughout the Middle Ages. But when the concept of Death-Satan as triumphant developed, the incantation, or warning appears to have been mainly directed against the lures and wiles of Satan proper.³¹ The figure of Death was depicted as inexorable, ineluctable and—at times—the hope of ultimate salvation through the merciful agency of Christ must have seemed remote indeed.³² This has led Owst to observe: "On its purely doctrinal side, then, the English pulpit of the waning Middle Ages has little inspiration to offer." Sermon after sermon seems to consist of sheer terrorism, as some preachers and schoolmen worked themselves into a frenzied description of the tortures of Hell and the suffering of the damned. Others, however, contends Owst, "speak living voices of hope, and blow the spring of a new Renaissance upon the Church, making the old sap of moral purpose rise once again within her."³³

CULTURAL SENTIMENT

(A) *The didactic element.* The *danse macabre* shares with the vast body of devotional literature the basic element of didactic admonition to sinners. Depicting the horror of death was regarded by the medieval preacher as an unfailing cure for the proud, the indifferent and the flippant. Many a pulpit was actually raised amid the tombs

³⁰ See the edition of R. J. Menner (1941) p. 38. Chanting parts of the *Pater Noster* against the Seven Deadly Sins is commonplace in medieval devotional literature.

³¹ The medieval preacher never tired of contending that the Devil assumed deceptive shapes such as that of a lewd woman, in order to lead men astray: the feendys skypeddyn aforne hem in lyknes of wommen, and thanne tho men in here herte were temptyd to leccherye . . . (*Jacob's Well*, *EETS OS* No. 116, p. 237).

³² Cf. the exhaustive study by R. A. Lattimore, *Themes in Greek and Latin Epitaphs* (Illinois Studies in Lang. & Lit., XXVIII, 1942, I-354). He concludes that, on the basis of the available epigraphical evidence, there was no "widespread, nor strong" belief in immortality. He notes carefully the pagan elements in Christian epitaphs (p. 317); describes the prevalence of the *memento mori* theme (p. 256); and notes the famous *quod tu es ego fui, quod nunc sum et tu eris* admonition to the living (p. 257).

³³ G. R. Owst, *Lit. & Pulpit*, pp. 54-55.

or even over a freshly dug grave, and the preacher could point with impassioned gesture to the pending end of man, made horrible beyond description if that man met his end with his sins unhouseled. Typical of the morbid mood of this theme in preaching and typical of the *danse macabre* itself in its more intense forms, is a passage such as the following:

Ri3t as a worme is but a litel and a foul thinge and of no prise, and cometh crepynge naked bare out of the erthe where he was bred, ri3t so a man at his begynnyng is a foule thing, litel and pore . . . Therefore seith the holy man Bernard thus: "quid est homo nisi sperma fetidum, saccus stercorum, esca vermium?" What is man, he seith, but a stynkyng slyme, and after that a sake ful of donge, and at the laste mete to wormes . . . ³³

While some preachers, no doubt, followed the easy path of devoting the energy of their teaching and preaching on men of good will and letting the scoffers and sinners follow the primrose path to the everlasting bonfire,³⁴ others did their duty as they saw it, and redoubled their efforts to reach all their congregation. How many of the listeners regarded these efforts with amusement or pious appreciation must, no doubt, remain a matter of conjecture.

The corpus of devotional literature in medieval and renaissance English, of *ars moriendi*, of forms of confession, of ways to Godliness is so vast that we can almost say that it represented a dominating cultural idealism, pointing to the endless dichotomy between what men preach and what they practice.³⁵

³³ Cited from Harley MS 45, fol. 112b, by G. R. Owst, *Preaching in Medieval England*, (1926), p. 341.

³⁴ In what may have been an unguarded moment, Wycliffe says that he decided to concentrate his attention on those who would appreciate it: When a gedrynge of peple is, summe comynly ben gode, for hem princpaly men prechen goddis word, and not for houndis that berken a3enst God and his lawis, ne for swyn that bathen hem in synne, and wolle nevere leven hem for drede of peyne ne hope of blisse. (*English Works*, ed. Mathew, *EETS OS* No. 74, pp. 110-11.)

³⁵ For typical expressions of didactic motif in literature contemporary with Lydgate see Carlton Brown, *Religious Lyrics of the Fifteenth Century* (1938), esp. No. 156, 157, 158. For persistence of the same general attitudes into Tudor England, see M. M. Knappen, *Tudor Puritanism* (1939); H. C. White, *Social Criticism in Popular Religious Literature of the Sixteenth Century* (1944); L. B. Wright, *Middle Class Culture in Elizabethan England* (1935), esp. chap. viii. Caxton, Pynson, and de Worde printed mainly devotional literature; and a quick glance at the titles in Pollard's *Short Title Catalogue* will give a clear picture of the reading tastes of the age. In the 15th century contemporary records indicate dozens of owners of Rolle MSS to one or two of The Canterbury Tales (R. W. Chambers, *On the Continuity of English Prose* [1932] p. ci.)

(B) *The element of satire.* Satire has about the same targets—the Seven Deadly Sins, in any age from Juvenal to Joyce. In Lydgate's poem the physician fond of gold, the lady of great estate given to "daliaunce," the lawyer and usurer bewitched by lucre, the proud archbishop, the fat abbot, the corrupt juror, the prioress who uses rouge, sports a wimple and costly furs and goes ungirt, are all noticeable. But these charges are typical, being in the French source, as well as being paralleled in English homiletic literature.³⁶ Readers who see in these types Chaucerian reminiscences should remember that Chaucer often deals with common charges.

(C) Closely related is the idea of "democracy," i.e., the equality of all men before Death, or before God. This is how Mâle describes one main import of the *danse macabre*. It would be misleading, however, to leave this statement unqualified. The official teaching of the Church was always, that while in origin and death all men are equal, during their career on earth God has ordained for them a rigid class (or caste) system³⁷ with different privileges and duties. Hence the typical hierarchy of the medieval society, based on an inevitable division of labor, was upheld.

The characteristic position of a typical "reformer," such as William Langland, has been aptly summarized by Ker:

Piers Plowman is one of the most impartial of reformers . . . His remedy for the evils of the world would be to bring the different estates—knights, clergy, labourers and all—to understand their proper duty. His political ideal is the commonwealth as it exists, only with each part working as it was meant to work. . . .³⁸

However some medieval preachers, while vitriolic in their denunciation of the pride and avarice of the rich and powerful, tempered their wind to the shorn lamb, and adopted the cause of the poor plowman and laborer, preaching in a "socialistic" vein. Others were impartial and denounced the poor for avarice and pride with equal vehemence.³⁹ In Lydgate's poem it is noticeable that Death speaks almost gently to the Laborer.

³⁶ See esp. G. R. Owst, *Literature & Pulpit in Medieval England* (1933) 210-471; for a general survey, see S. M. Tucker, *Verse Satire in England before the Renaissance* (1908).

³⁷ See, in general, Ruth Mohl, *The Three Estates in Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (1933).

³⁸ W. P. Ker, *English Medieval Literature* (Home Univ. Libr.) p. 200.

³⁹ Owst, *Lit. and Pulpit*, p. 367-8.

(D) *The Day of Judgement* or the Day of Wrath (*Dies Irae*). While there is no evidence of direct influence of the Day of Judgement theme, so forcefully depicted on the tympanum at Amiens, there are many points of similarity with the *danse macabre*. In both, all ranks of society are summoned or snatched from life to some situs of final reckoning. In many representations the protesting human beings are dragged off by leering devils. In others the human beings accept their fate in sad resignation.⁴⁰

Now this theme was important in English medieval preaching. And the bitter vindictiveness with which preachers predicted the fall and judgement of the rich and mighty contained a marked element of violent and "primitive" vengeance. Owst has noted the effect which such an idea must have had on many discontented and suffering persons who felt that such preaching justified their active role in bringing the eventual judgement of an angry God to bear, and taking matters into their own horny hands. The various peasant uprisings, so characteristic of Europe from the Great Rebellion of 1381 to the German Peasants' Revolt in Luther's time, appear to have been sparked, in some instances, by the rabid "socialistic" preaching and agitation of priests. Owst writes:

Sacred orators of the Church, as hostile to class war, to earthly revenge and social revolution, as any Luther, were here unconsciously formulating a revolutionary charter of grievances. With the one hand they were really instructing the rebels of tomorrow how to present their case and prepare for the struggle, while, on the other, they sought to restrain them from taking any action in the matter. Everyone can guess which hand was likely to prevail . . . The very Judgment scene itself was certainly designed not to excite but to pacify and console the sufferers while it warned the offender. The righteous poor were by means of it to know that "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord; I will repay" (*Mihi vindicta; et ego retribuam*). This latter was a doctrine enforced by the pulpit with equal care . . . ⁴¹

⁴⁰ The iconography of the Last Judgment is often blended with medieval conceptions of Hell and final retribution; cf. E. H. Wilkins, "Dante and the Mosaics of his Bel San Giovanni," *Speculum* II (1927) 1-10. In the same issue of *Speculum*, pp. 177-200, T. Spencer, in an interesting art. "Chaucer's Hell" reprints the famous depiction of the suffering of the damned from the *Très Riches Heures* of the Duc de Berri.

⁴¹ Owst, *op. cit.*, pp. 295-6.

HISTORICAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Since Europe was visited by many waves of Black Deaths and other plagues and epidemics, as well as racked by Hundred Year wars and riots during the 14th and 15th centuries, some scholars have seen the strong impetus to the *danse macabre* in the psychological morbidity of people affected by these violent upheavals. French social conditions, in particular, during the middle of the 15th century have often been described in lurid color, and the old tale of wolves stalking the grass covered streets of Paris has been a favorite cliché of the popular historian. One writer of this school, seeking a cause for fantasy in French garb and behavior during this period, says:

La terreur du Jugement, l'appréhension de la mort reparaissent comme à la veille de l'an mil. . . la France danse et fait des mascarades . . . En ce temps-là, l'hiver, des bandes de loups parcourent Paris desert. Cependant, la ronde vertigineuse se reforme partout, dans les rues, dans les églises, enfin dans les cimetières. C'est la danse macabre, la dernière originalité du génie national, l'adieu funèbre que l'on fait à la civilisation.⁴²

It has been customary for some English historians to view the 15th century as one of continual riot and anarchy because of the ravages of the brawl between Lancaster and York, although calmer heads have urged that the 15th century was not radically different than other centuries. Kingsford wrote:

We are so accustomed to think of the middle fifteenth century as a period of wild political disorder that it is with a sense of surprise that we find people going quietly about their business and dancing, and that if means of communication were hazardous and difficult they were not altogether fortuitous.⁴³

Of course there was lawlessness,⁴⁴ epidemics, sudden death and misery

⁴² Emile Gebhart, *Les Origines de la Renaissance en Italie* (1923) p. 36.

⁴³ C. L. Kingsford, *Prejudice & Promise in XVth Century England* (1925) p. 33. He argues that the "myth" of 15th century anarchy was started by Hall, an apologist for the Tudors who had supposedly saved England from anarchy, whose history was copied by Holinshed, who in turn was copied by Shakespeare. Yet a Victorian historian, Creighton, writing in *Traill's Social England*, II, sec. ii, p. 569, spoke of the mid 15th century as being a "period of peaceful development notwithstanding the Wars of the Roses."

⁴⁴ H. S. Bennett, *The Pastons and their England* (1922), chapt. xiii "Lawlessness," stresses the violent tenor of life; and observes that in casting off serfdom the poor and weak lost the protection and sustenance which custom had counterpoised to their legal disabilities (p. 180).

—there is in any age: a visitor from Mars could get a distorted impression of modern life if he merely read the front pages of a newspaper, which deals with the unusual, the terrible, without clearly realizing that what was portrayed thereon was the unusual.

Yet one cannot dismiss the facts of plague, violence, and misery from any account of the *danse macabre*. They are part of the same cultural milieu which found meditation on decay and death as a persistent theme throughout the 15th century.⁴⁵ Villon, perhaps the greatest poet of the age, continually sings in the *ubi sunt* vein, although the tough masculinity, the quick retort, the Gallic egotism, may be taken as symbolic indication that at least one European had not been overwhelmed by hopeless melancholia even though the characteristic burden of literature of his age is that the sweetest songs tell of saddest thought, and the characteristic material of medieval chronicles is fire, famine, fever, floods, fighting and frustration.

IV

The *danse macabre* has not been regarded as a thing of beauty by modern scholars. Warren says that "It is pleasant to escape from this atmosphere of morbid horror." Caix de Saint-Aymour called it a *hideuse moralité*, devised *avec la complicité de prédicateurs*, and born of *sentiment crétien*. Speaking of the close of the Middle Ages in France, Evans says, in a broader interpretation: "The hidden principle of Renaissance art is pride; its avowed aim is earthly glory, and its moral teaching is the *danse macabre*."⁴⁷ Huizinga writes: "The dominant thought, as expressed by the literature, both ecclesiastical and lay of that period (the waning Middle Ages) hardly knew anything with regard to death but these two extremes: lamentation about the briefness of all earthly glory, and jubilation over the salvation of the soul. All that lay between—pity, resignation, longing, consolation—remained unexpressed . . . Living emotion stiffens amid the abused imagery of skeletons and worms. . . At bottom the macabre sentiment is self-seeking and earthly. It is hardly the absence of the departed dear ones that is deplored; it is the fear of one's own death, and this only seen as the worst of evils."⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Cf. Henry Lucas, *The Renaissance and the Reformation* (1934), chapt. xi, for a conventional description of the "average European mind," influenced by popular religion and superstition, during the "pessimistic" 15th century.

⁴⁶ *La Grande Encyclopédia*, xiii, 884. One would have been grateful for a clarification of Saint-Aymour's point about Christian sentiment.

⁴⁷ Joan Evans, *Medieval France* (1925) p. 200.

⁴⁸ Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, p. 214.

And doubts have been expressed concerning the efficiency of the *danse* as a didactic device⁴⁹ to stimulate the sinner to mend his ways. Mâle says: that it retained little of a Christian character "*dépouillée de son commentaire. . . . Les illettrés qui la contemplaient au cimetière des Innocents sans pouvoir lire les vers édifiants du préambule et de la conclusion, étaient libres de l'interpréter à leur guise. La plupart, il faut le croire, y trouvaient un encouragement à bien faire, mais quelques-uns, sans doute, y voyaient une invitation à jouir de cette courte vie. Au cimetière des Innocents, les filles de joie erraient sous les cloîtres et parmi les tombeaux.*"⁵⁰ Ivins writes of the Marchand woodcuts: "They made nobody sad . . . Marchand's Dance is as impersonal as an actuary's tables . . . In its matter-of-factness about a subject that later ages have timidly ceased thinking about, it provides one of the most illuminating of all our documents for the mentality of the end of the middle ages in France."⁵¹ It is not unlikely that some London loiterers of Lydgate's day paid little solemn atten-

⁴⁹ G. G. Coulton, *Art and the Reformation* (1928) advances the speculative theory that medieval art and religion had been separate growths; this thesis was part of a critique of Mâle's view that the puritanical iconoclastic Reformation had hampered artistic production, especially after the Council of Trent. The problems opened up by such speculation are very complicated, and must depend, in large degree, on selected and partial evidence. Some preachers, of a puritan cast of mind, always distrusted art as mere vanity: several sermons go so far as to state that it is sinful to waste money on an elaborate crucifix when the money had better be spent on the relief of the poor (Owst, *Lit. & Pulpit*, p. 99). But if art was to be regarded solely as a handmaiden or instrument of didactic teaching, such an attitude would presumably have been accommodated to the practical need. Closely related is the question of the function of "realism" or "naturalism"; a sample of the usual view that the Renaissance saw a rapid development in this direction is as follows: Man will nicht mehr bloss symbolische Andeutungen, nicht mehr bloss "Illustration," man will endlich die Natur genauer ins Auge fassen und die Dinge wirklich so darstellen, wie sie sind, man will sich bald nicht mehr bloss auf das Allernotwendigste in der Darstellung beschränken, sondern im Bilde all das ausdrücken, was man sieht und empfindet (Franz Jacobi, *Die Deutsche Buchmalerei*, 1923, p. 66). To speak of "realism," or "naturalism," in the depiction of a personification, such as Death, or of an hypostasis or reification such as a demon, raises some interesting, and puzzling problems. What constituted realism to the medieval worker in symbolism? Did not many symbols—which to us seem mere fictions—appear very "real" to him? Furthermore, it is, I think, somewhat wide of the mark to patronize the medieval artist, or preacher, as being superstitious when he reduces abstract ideas to homely particular or to vivid personification, for that is the only way in which most minds can grasp ideal relations—in any age. Panofsky has shown how some of the pictures of Titian, which seem to modern taste to be largely inspired by "naturalistic" aims and tendencies, illustrate some of the basic concepts of Ficino's neo-platonic philosophy (*op. cit.*, 150-169); a great deal of Renaissance art, even that which is concerned with such utilitarian matters as portraiture, is shot through with symbolism.

⁵⁰ Mâle, p. 380.

⁵¹ Ivins, int. to *Marchand's Dance of Death* (1945, Library of Congress reprint) p. x.

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tion to the Dance of Paul's; others may have regarded it with the absorbed curiosity of a visitor to a modern art museum; still others may have gained from it a certain feeling of adjustment to the inevitable, rather than a sharp stab of remorse for past misdeeds. English churches in the 15th century, both rural and urban, were much more the center of social life than they are now, if for no other reason than that they were not used in those days exclusively for religious purposes. The main purpose of both church and priest was to enable the folk to hear Mass daily, although possibly most people could attend only on Sunday or important feast days. Perhaps the very frequency of the service lessened its psychological value.

It is always difficult to interpret the possible effect which artifacts of another age had on the folk of another age. We may know our own reactions; but how can we always be sure of the reactions of folk belonging to another social context? One generalization may be advanced: ritual, ceremony or artifact means what a folk intends it to mean, and we can never interpret on the basis of an artifact alone—we must see it in dynamic relation to the cultural complex of which it is an integral and component part.⁵²

But few scholars have been able to resist the itch to generalize about the "spirit of the time," the Volksgeist, l'âme Française, on the basis of the evidence afforded by a single, or a few, artifacts.⁵³

Hence the cultural historian is reduced to mere conjecture con-

⁵² For a dynamic theory of cultural interpretation, see esp. B. Malinowski, *A Scientific Theory of Culture* (1944); for a critique of some of Malinowski's ideas, see Lord Raglan "Magic and Religion," *Folk-Lore* (1939) 115-136. Comparetti, one of the great medievalists of the 19th century, after studying the medieval legends which sprang up concerning Virgil, said that "the human mind worked on different principles than those which have guided it at more normal (*sic*) periods of history" (*Virgil in the Middle Ages*, Benecke trans. of 1895, p. 241). This may indicate the scorn of the classical scholar for "vulgar" Latin as well as the patronizing attitude of a "rational" 19th century intellectual towards a "primitive" age; but it is certainly the wrong attitude for the cultural historian to assume. The term "primitive" is invidious, as well as misleading: a great deal of medieval art and literature is sophisticated, mature, and even blasé.

⁵³ For example, Dover Wilson, a mature and competent textual scholar, writes—no doubt as a nodding Homer—that because the early plays of Shakespeare are happy comedies and his later plays tragic, hence the dramatist was happy during the reign of Elizabeth and unhappy during the reign of James. And a further assumption extends to England as a whole the assumed moods of Shakespeare: The Elizabethan period was one of "halcyon days of happy ease, illimitable hope and untarnished honour" (*The Essential Shakespeare*, 1933, p. 36). Jane Ellen Harrison, in her book *Mythology* (a contribution to the *Our Debt to Greece and Rome*, series in 1922) argued that Greek mythology banished fear—apparently because some Greek myths are pretty (p. 144). One wonders what the Mitylenians felt just before their able-bodied men were massacred by the Athenians (Thucydides, III, ix).

cerning the possible effect of Lydgate's Dance of Paul's. The safest assumption is simply that it must have affected different persons in different ways. There never was any unanimity in religious thought or moral sentiment during the Middle Ages, however predominant the official and orthodox Catholic faith was in Europe. An age which embraced manifold pagan superstitions, relic and saint worship, addition to the un-Christian preoccupation with the cruel whims of Fortuna and her terrible wheel, could hardly be termed unified in Christian feeling. The Church, even when it was not split by schism, pillaged by confiscation, or harried by governments,⁵⁴ was beset on one hand by the heresies of mystics, moral rigorists, and Biblical literalists such as the Lollards,⁵⁵ and, on the other hand, by the gross errancy and credulity of the illiterate.⁵⁶

The ideas in Lydgate's poem never wholly died out, while a new age turned to other modes of devotional expression. Many ballads of the 16th and 17th centuries testify to the perpetual concern with such unavoidable topics. The 18th century "graveyard" poets revive, according to their needs and feelings, the sad mood of meditation among the monuments to the departed, and voice the perpetual recognition that in death all men are equal, even if in life many a flower is born to blush unseen.⁵⁷ And a modern American poet, Conrad Aiken in his penetrating poem *John Deth* (1930), draws on sentiments and images which go back a thousand years in the folk-lore of the Western world.

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⁵⁴ Cf. C. W. New, *A History of Alien Priories in England to the Confiscation of Henry V*, (1916); for the argument that Catholic religious drama was virtually destroyed by the political censorship of Henry VIII's ministers, see H. G. Gardiner, *Mysteries' End* (Yale Studies in English, No. 103, 1946).

⁵⁵ Cf. J. Gairdner, *Lollardy and the Reformation in England* (1908).

⁵⁶ For a sketch of the "popular mind" in the 15th century, see Lucas *op. cit.*, and J. A. MacCulloch, *Medieval Faith and Fable* (1932) *passim*; for the spirit of "protestantism" against the Roman Church, see G. G. Coulton, *Medieval Panorama* (1938) esp. chapt. 51; for a study of the attitudes of the humanists, the intelligensia of their day, see R. Weiss, *Humanism in England during the Fifteenth Century*, (1941), who stresses "utility" rather than the pursuit of belles lettres as their main concern.

⁵⁷ See examples printed by W. Chappell, *Popular Music of the Olden Time* (1859) i, 84; H. Rollins, *Old English Ballads 1553-1625* (1920) p. 257; the 18th century "graveyard" poets are represented by Young, *Night Thoughts* (1742-5) Blair, *Grave* (1743) and, of course, Gray's *Elegy* (1750).

* Karl Brunner's important art. "Mittelenglische Todesgedichte," *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen* vol. 167 (1935) 19-34, came to my attention too late to be used in this paper; it does not invalidate my general remarks.

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SPANISH RIDDLES FROM ST. BERNARD PARISH, LOUISIANA

by

Raymond R. MacCurdy, Jr.

The following riddles were collected in the town of Delacroix in St. Bernard Parish, Louisiana, which is located in the southeastern part of the state. The parish is bounded by Orleans Parish and Lake Borgne on the north, by the Gulf of Mexico on the east and southeast, and by Plaquemines Parish on the west and southwest. A large proportion of the land area of the parish is composed of marshland which is traversed by numerous intersecting bayous and dotted by a system of shallow lakes and inland bays.

In 1778, during the administration of Governor Bernardo de Gálvez, Spanish immigrants were settled on Bayou Terre-aux-Boeufs, approximately twenty-five miles south of the city of New Orleans. The descendants of the original colonists are called "Islanders," from Spanish *isleños*, because they came from the Canary Islands. Spanish is still the primary language of the towns of Delacroix, Reggio, Ycloskey, and to a lesser extent of Shell Beach; however, the great majority of the inhabitants are now perfectly bilingual in Spanish and English, and a few also speak Louisiana-French. There has been a small amount of recent immigration to the Spanish-speaking communities of St. Bernard Parish from Spain and Latin-America, but the informants for the riddles contained herein are all native-born.¹

1

Verde fué mi nacimiento,
Colorado fué mi vivir,
Negra me fuí poniendo
Hasta me quise morir.

—Mora.

This riddle or variants of it have been collected in California,² Puerto Rico,³ Guatemala,⁴ Argentina,⁵ Spain,⁶ and in the provinces of Asturias⁷ and Andalusia.⁸

¹ The informants, all residents of Delacroix, are: Nos. 1-7, Adam Pérez, Jr., 18 years of age; Nos. 8-10, Joe García, 13 years old; Nos. 11-22. Sra. Nick Pérez, 35 years old.

² Aurelio M. Espinosa, "California Spanish Folklore Riddles," *California Folklore Quarterly*, III (1924), No. 22.

³ J. Alden Mason and Aurelio M. Espinosa, "Porto Rican Folklore Riddles,"

2

Un saquito de avellanas,
De día se recogen
Y de noche se desparraman.

—Estrellas.

Close variants of this riddle have been recorded in California,⁹ Puerto Rico,¹⁰ Santo Domingo,¹¹ Argentina,¹² Spain,¹³ and in the province of Andalusia.¹⁴

3

Dos toreadores, dos miradores,
Cuatro toronjas y un matamoscos.

—Vaca (cuernos, ojos,
tetras y cola).

Variants of this riddle are recorded for Puerto Rico,¹⁵ Santo Domingo,¹⁶ Argentina,¹⁷ Spain,¹⁸ especially the province of Asturias.¹⁹

Journal of American Folklore, XXIX (1916), No. 279 (higo). (The *Journal of American Folklore* is hereafter abbreviated *JAF*).

⁹ Adrián Recinos, "Adivinanzas recogidas en Guatemala," *JAF*, XXXI (1918), No. 41.

¹⁰ Robert Lehmann-Nitsche, *Folklore argentino*, I. *Adivinanzas riplatenses*, Buenos Aires, 1911, No. 76.

¹¹ F. Rodríguez Marín, *Cantos populares españoles*, Sevilla, 1882, I, Nos. 558-562.

¹² Bernardo Acevedo y Huelves and Marcelino Fernández y Fernández, *Vocabulario del bable de occidente*, Madrid, 1932, Apéndice II, No. XXII.

¹³ Fernán Caballero, *Cuentos, oraciones, adivinas y refranes populares e infantiles*, Madrid, 1877, No. 133.

¹⁴ Espinosa, *op. cit.*, No. 3.

¹⁵ Mason and Espinosa, *op. cit.*, No. 225.

¹⁶ Manuel J. Andrade, *Folk-Lore from the Dominican Republic* (Memoirs of the American Folk-Lore Society, vol. XXIII), New York, 1930, No. 145.

¹⁷ Lehmann-Nitsche, *op. cit.*, No. 540.

¹⁸ Rodríguez Marín, *op. cit.*, No. 264.

¹⁹ Fernán Caballero, *op. cit.*, No. 1.

²⁰ Mason and Espinosa, *op. cit.*, No. 538.

²¹ Andrade, *op. cit.*, No. 296.

²² Lehmann-Nitsche, *op. cit.*, No. 549.

²³ Rodríguez Marín, *op. cit.*, Nos. 337, 338.

²⁴ Acevedo and Fernández, *op. cit.*, No. XIII.

4

Quite, mete, saque y pone.

—Tapa de pote.

A variant of this riddle has been found only in Asturias.²⁰

5

Peluda por fuera,
Peluda por dentro,
Alza la pata
Y métala adentro.

—Media.

The nucleus of this riddle has suffered little modification despite its widespread currency. Close variants have been recorded in California,²¹ New Mexico,²² Puerto Rico,²³ Cuba,²⁴ Santo Domingo,²⁵ Spain,²⁶ and the province of Asturias especially.²⁷

6

Alto por alto,
Redondo como un plato.

—Luna.

This riddle is listed for Puerto Rico,²⁸ Argentina,²⁹ and Asturias.³⁰

7

Una señorita muy enseñorada,
Siempre está en su coche
Y siempre está mojada.

—Lengua.

²⁰ Acevedo and Fernández, *op. cit.*, No. XVIII.

²¹ Espinosa, *op. cit.*, Nos. 33, 34.

²² Aurelio M. Espinosa, "New-Mexican Spanish Folk-Lore. IX Riddles," *JAFL*. XXVIII (1915), No. 71.

²³ Mason and Espinosa, *op. cit.*, No. 361.

²⁴ S. Massip, "Adivinanzas corrientes en Cuba," *Archivos del folklore cubano*, I, No. 126.

²⁵ Andrade, *op. cit.*, No. 80.

²⁶ Rodríguez Marín, *op. cit.*, No. 633 (pantalones).

²⁷ Acevedo and Fernández, *op. cit.*, No. XVII.

²⁸ Mason and Espinosa, *op. cit.*, No. 330.

²⁹ Lehmann-Nitsche, *op. cit.*, No. 588.

³⁰ Acevedo and Fernández, *op. cit.*, No. V.

The nucleus of this riddle varies considerably in the different regions where it has been collected, only the last line generally remaining unchanged. Most variants have the word *aseñorada* in the first line instead of *enseñorada*. Variants are listed for California,³¹ New Mexico,³² Puerto Rico,³³ Cuba,³⁴ Santo Domingo,³⁵ Argentina,³⁶ Spain,³⁷ and Asturias.³⁸

8

Una casita muy encaladita,
Sin puertas, sin ventanitas.

—Huevo.

This riddle has not been collected elsewhere in this identical form. The closest variants are found in Santo Domingo³⁹ and Argentina.⁴⁰

9

Más cerca más lejos,
Más lejos más cerca.

—Barrera (=Cerca).

Variants are listed for Puerto Rico,⁴¹ Santo Domingo,⁴² and Spain.⁴³

10

Más corta, más larga.

—Zanja.

This riddle is listed only for Guatemala.⁴⁴

³¹ Espinosa, "California Spanish Folklore Riddles," *op. cit.*, No. 19.

³² Espinosa, "New-Mexican Spanish Folk-Lore," *op. cit.*, No. 66.

³³ Mason and Espinosa, *op. cit.*, No. 311(g).

³⁴ Massip, *op. cit.*, No. 112.

³⁵ Andrade, *op. cit.*, No. 188.

³⁶ Lehmann-Nitsche, *op. cit.*, Nos. 248, 319, 471.

³⁷ Demófilo, *Colección de enigmas y adivinanzas en forma de diccionario*, Sevilla, 1880, Nos. 589, 591, 593, 595.

³⁸ Acevedo and Fernández, *op. cit.*, No. XIII.

³⁹ Mason and Espinosa, *op. cit.*, No. 311(g).

⁴⁰ Lehmann-Nitsche, *op. cit.*, No. 503.

⁴¹ Mason and Espinosa, *op. cit.*, No. 163.

⁴² Andrade, *op. cit.*, No. 113.

⁴³ Rodríguez Marín, *op. cit.*, No. 593.

⁴⁴ Recinos, *op. cit.*, No. 70.

11

Sácalo, comadre, quiero ver,
Y Dios lo bendice
Y vuélvelo a meter.

—Pan.

A close variant is found in Santo Domingo.⁴⁵

12

Verde como perejil pero no es perejil,
Tiene espinas como un peje y no es de la mar,
Tiene corona como un rey pero no es un rey.

—Níspero
(=nispola).

No close variant of this riddle has been found in any collection. The second line is very similar to No. 24 of Espinosa's California collection, but the answer to the latter is *cebada verde en el campo*.

13

El Médico y su hija,
El boticario y su mujer,
Se comieron nueve huevos
Y cada uno partieron tres.

—El médico y el boticario
son la misma persona.

Close variants are found in Puerto Rico,⁴⁶ Santo Domingo,⁴⁷ Guatemala,⁴⁸ Argentina,⁴⁹ Spain,⁵⁰ particularly in the province of Andalusia.⁵¹ However, the usual solution is: the daughter of one man is the wife of the other.

14

Padre, escoja este ramo
De la mano de este niño,
Que es mi niño y mi nieto
Y el hermano de mi marido.

⁴⁵ Andrade, *op. cit.*, No. 235.

⁴⁶ Mason and Espinosa, *op. cit.*, No. 727.

⁴⁷ Andrade, *op. cit.*, No. 362.

⁴⁸ Recinos, *op. cit.*, No. 83.

⁴⁹ Lehmann-Nitsche, *op. cit.*, No. 724.

⁵⁰ Rodríguez Marín, *op. cit.*, 928.

⁵¹ Fernán Caballero, *op. cit.*, No. 107.

—Una mujer se casó con su
hijo y después tuvieron un
hijito, y fué al cura para
perdonarles.

Close variants are found in Guatemala⁵² and Puerto Rico.⁵³

15

Cien patos por un camino
Dando paso regular,
Paso entre paso
Con una pata nada más.

—Cien patos andaban con una
pata hembra.

Variants are found in Puerto Rico⁵⁴ and Spain.⁵⁵

16

¿A las cuántas vueltas se acuesta el perro?

—A la última.

This identical riddle is found in Puerto Rico.⁵⁶

17

¿Qué hora toca el pandil⁵⁷ cuando toca las trece?

—Hora para
arrancharlo.⁵⁸

No variant of this riddle has been found in any collection.

18

¿Qué es el último que hace usted cuando se va a cama?

—Levantar
los pies.

No variant of this riddle has been found.

⁵² Recinos, *op. cit.*, No. 77.

⁵³ Mason and Espinosa, *op. cit.*, No. 762.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, No. 729.

⁵⁵ Rodríguez Marín, *op. cit.*, No. 384.

⁵⁶ Mason and Espinosa, *op. cit.*, No. 710.

⁵⁷ *Pandil* means "clock," from French *pendule*.

⁵⁸ *Arranchar*=*arreglar*.

19

¿Por qué va usted a la cama?

—Porque la cama no viene a usted.

Also found in Argentina.⁵⁹

20

¿Cuándo más caso usted le hace a la campana?

—Cuando entra usted en
la iglesia.

No variant has been found in any collection.

21

¿Cuándo lleva usted al más frío?

—Cuando la nariz lo siente más.

No variant has been found.

22

Había un hombre en un barco vendiendo papeles para no marearse.
¿Qué dice el papel?—Que no se embarque.

No variant has been found in any collection.

University of Georgia

⁵⁹ Lehmann-Nitsche, *op. cit.*, No. 881.

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IRWIN RUSSELL AND FOLK LITERATURE

by

James Wilson Webb

Although Irwin Russell, Southern dialect poet, was only twenty-six years old at the time of his death,¹ he had lived long enough to show the literary possibilities of Negro character, dialect, and folk material. When his best poems were gleaned from *Scribner's Monthly* and other magazines and published in 1888, Joel Chandler Harris stated in the preface which he wrote for the collection that

Irwin Russell was among the first—if not the very first—of Southern writers to appreciate the literary possibilities of the negro character, and of the unique relations existing between the two races before the war, and was among the first to develop them. . . . His negro operetta, "Christmas Night in the Quarters," is inimitable. It combines the features of a character study with a series of bold and striking pictures that have never been surpassed. In this remarkable group,—if I may so term it—the old life before the war is reproduced with a fidelity that is marvelous.²

During the same year, Thomas Nelson Page and Armistead Gordon published their collection of Negro dialect poems entitled *Befo' De War: Echoes in Negro Dialect* and dedicated it "To Irwin Russell who awoke the first echo."³ In this collection, Page includes a poem, "The One Mourner," about a grief stricken old Virginia Negro who is so "sorry Marse Irwin's dead." In a burst of generosity, Page remarked, "Personally I owe much to him. It was the light of his genius shining through his dialect poems—first of dialect poems then and still first—that led my feet in the direction I have since tried to follow."⁴

Such strong statements as these coming from Harris and Page, whose positions in the field of Negro dialect stories and poems are

¹ Irwin Russell was born in Port Gibson, Mississippi, June 3, 1853, and died in New Orleans, Louisiana, December 23, 1879.

² Maurice Garland Fulton (ed.), *Christmas Night in the Quarters and Other Poems* (New York: The Century Company, 1917), p. x. This collection, which is an expansion of the 1888 publication, retained the introduction by Harris.

³ Thomas Nelson Page and Armistead Gordon, *Befo' De War: Echoes in Negro Dialect* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1888), Dedication.

⁴ William Lander Weber (ed.), *Selections from the Southern Poets* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1901), p. xxv.

secure, should carry much weight in the minds of those who would appraise Russell and his influence on his contemporaries. Now one might well raise the question of his influence since his death in 1879. It is at this point that one might turn to folk literature, particularly that of the Negro.

An interesting parallel is found in comparing a portion of Russell's "Christmas Night in the Quarters" with a chant that was used by a colored fiddler during a "heel-and-toe" affair in Lawrence, Kansas. Russell's poem appeared in *Scribner's Monthly Magazine*, January, 1878, almost two years before the Negro fiddler's chant was published, without author or title, in the *Tri-Weekly Courier* (Rome, Georgia, November 29, 1879). The two versions are as follows:

(Russell's version from

"Christmas Night in the Quarters")
 The rev'rend man is scarcely through,
 When all the noise begins anew,
 And with such force assaults the ears,
 That through the din one hardly hears
 Old Fiddling Josey "sound his A"—
 Correct the pitch—begin to play—
 Stop, satisfied, then, with the bow,
 Rap out the signal dancers know:

Git yo' pardners, fust kwattilion!
Stomp yo' feet, an' raise 'em high;
Tune is: "Oh, dat water-million!
Gwine to get to home bime-bye."
S'lute yo' pardners!—scrape perlitley—
Don't be bumpin' gin de res'—
Balance all!—now, step out rightly;
Alluz dance yo' lebbel bes'.
Fo'wa'd foah!—whoop up, niggers!
Back ag'in!—Don't be so slow!—
Swing cornahs!—min' de figgers!
When I hollers, den yo' go.
Top ladies cross ober!
Hol' on, till I takes a dram—
Gemmen solo!—yes I's sober—
Kain't say how de fiddle am—
Hands around!—hol' up yo' faces,
Don't be lookin' at yo' feet!
Swing yo' pardners to yo' places!
Dats de way—dat's hard to beat.
Sides fo'w'd!—when you's ready—
Make a bow as low's you kin!
Swing acrost wid opp'site lady!
 Now we'll let you swap ag'in;

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Ladies change!—shet up dat talkin';
 Do yo' talkin' arter while—
Right and lef'!—don't want no walkin'—
 Make yo' steps, an' show yo' style!⁵

(*Tri-Weekly Courier* version, complete
 with introduction)

Recently, at a heel-and-toe affair held in
 Lawrence, Kansas, as the colored fiddler
 "called off" the cotillion he chanted the
 following:

Git yo' pardners, fust kwatillion!
 Stomp yo' feet, an' raise 'em high;
 Tune is "Oh, dat watermillion!
 Gwine to git home bimeby."

S'lute yo' pardners! scrape perlitely;
 Don't be bumpin' 'gin de res',
 Balance all! now step out rightly;
 Alluz dance yo' level best'. [sic.]

Forward, foah! whoop up, niggers,
 Back agin! don't be so slow;
 Swing cornahs! min' the figgers;
 When I hollers, den yo' go.

Hands around! hol' up yo' faces;
 Don't be lookin' at yo' feet;
 Swing yo' pardners to yo' places!
 Dat's de way—dat's hard to beat.

Sides fo'ward! when yo's ready,
 Make a bow as low's yo' kin;
 Swing acrost wid op'sit lady!
 Now we'll let yo' swap agin.

Ladies, change! shet up dat talkin';
 Do yo' talkin' arter 'while;
 Right and left; don't want no walkin';
 Make yo' steps, an show yo' style.⁶

Is it possible that the *Tri-Weekly Courier* version, as used by the
 colored fiddler in Lawrence, Kansas, could have been drawn from
 Russell's version, or is it safer to say that the two were drawn from

⁵ Irwin Russell, "Christmas Night in the Quarters," *Scribner's Monthly Magazine*, XV (January 1878), pp. 445-448.

⁶ *Tri-Weekly Courier*, XIX (November 29, 1879), p. 4.

a common source? The similarity of the two poems is immediately apparent. "Christmas Night in the Quarters" was written as the result of Russell's visit in the home of Mr. Evan Jefferies during a Christmas season in the 1870's. He went down to the "quarters" one night and saw ex-slaves enjoying themselves in a world all their own. After spending some time looking on, the young poet went back to his room and wrote the poem before retiring. The chant used in calling the set was no doubt recorded very much as the old Negro sang it off that night in the quarters. The Negro characters referred to elsewhere in the poem—Aunt Cassy, Fiddlin' Josey, Brudder Brown, and Georgy Sam—were all drawn directly from life. They all lived on the Jefferies plantation several miles east of Port Gibson, Mississippi.⁷ These facts indicate that Russell drew his material largely from ex-slaves in this vicinity. The *Tri-Weekly Courier* version appeared in print almost two years after Russell's and the introduction makes it clear that the chant was called off by a colored fiddler "recently, at a heel-and-toe affair held in Lawrence, Kansas." Facts other than these contained in this obscure Georgia newspaper, dated November 29, 1879, have not yet been uncovered. In this case, where facts obtained are few and where further information is elusive, one is tempted to resort to conjecture. As it has already been pointed out, Russell's version was drawn directly from Negroes near Port Gibson, Mississippi, and was published first. Nevertheless, is it likely that the colored fiddler in Lawrence, Kansas had read Russell's poem in *Scribner's Monthly*? The two chants may have come from a common source, even though one would expect them to follow the practice of oral literature generally and differ more in details. Here the only differences of significance are the drinking scene found in Russell's version and the divisions into four line stanzas of the *Tri-Weekly* version. These differences, however, are enough to prove that there was no direct copying of one from the other. This chant, in different versions, was no doubt the common property of Negroes over a wide area.

In another instance, it appears that a portion of Russell's "Christmas Night in the Quarters" actually passed into traditional ballad literature. The account of "De Fust Banjo," lines 184-227 of "Christmas Night in the Quarters," appeared in *Scribner's Monthly*,

⁷ This information was given to the writer of this article by Mrs. Maggie Williams Musgrove Taylor and her two sisters, Miss Ella Williams and Mrs. Sallie Williams Englesing of Port Gibson, Mississippi. These sisters were contemporaries and personal friends of Irwin Russell.

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January, 1878. This portion of the poem, in traditional ballad stanza form, appeared as "Old Noah" in a collection of folk songs entitled *Folk-Songs of the South* by John Harrington Cox, who made a collection of the folk songs of West Virginia. Under the title, the poem is described as being "contributed by Mr. Decker Toney, Queens Ridge, Wayne County, January 20, 1916; learned from his mother, who learned it from her mother, who learned it from Sarah Vance, who learned it from her uncle, Riley Vance."⁸ The texts of the two versions are as follows:

DE FUST BANJO

Go 'way, fiddle!—folks is tired o' hearin' you a-squakin'.
Keep silence fur yo' betters—don't you heah de banjo talkin'?
About de 'possum's tail she's gwine to lecter—ladies, listen!—
About de ha'r whut is n't dar, an' why de ha'r is missin':

"Dar's gwine to be a oberflow," said Noah, lookin' solemn—
Fur Noah tuk the "Herald," an' he read de ribber column—
An' so he sot his hands to work a-cl'arin' timber-patches,
An' 'lowed he's gwin to build a boat to beat de steamah
"Natchez."

Ol' Noah kep' a-nailin' an' a-chippin' an' a-sawin';
An' all de wicked neighbors kep' a-laughin' an' a-pshawin';
But Noah did n't min' 'em—knowin' whut wuz gwine to happen:
An' forty days an' forty nights de rain it kep' a-drappin'.

Now, Noah had done cotched a lot ob ebry sort o' beas'es—
Ob all de shows a-trabbelin', it beat 'em all to pieces!
He had a Morgan colt an' sebral head o' Jarsey cattle—
An' druv 'em 'board de Ark as soon's he heered de thunder
rattle.

Den sech anoder fall ob rain!—it come so awful hebby,
De ribber riz immejitly an' busted troo de lebbe;
De people all wuz drowned out—'cep' Noah an' de critters,
An' men he'd hired to work de boat—an' one to mix de bitters.

De Ark she kep' a-sailin' an' a-sailin', an' a-sailin';
De lion he got his dander up, an' like to bruk de palin'—
De sarpints hissed; de painters yelled—tell, what wid all
de fussin',
Yo c'u'd n't hardly heah de mate a-bossin' 'roun' an' cussin.

⁸ John Harrington Cox, *Folk Songs of the South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925), p. 508.

Now, Ham, de only nigger whut wuz runnin' on de packet,
 Got lonesome in de barber-shop, an' c'u'd n't stan' de racket;
 An' so, fur to amuse he-se'f, he steamed some wood an' bent it,
 An' soon he had a banjo made—de fust dat wuz invented.

He wet de ledder, stretched it on; made bridge an' screws
 an' aprin;
 An' fitted in a proper neck—'t wuz berry long an' tap'rin';
 He tuk some tin, an' twisted him a thimble fur to ring it;
 An' den de mighty question riz: how wuz he gwine to string it?

De 'possum had as fine a tail as dis dat I'se a-singin';
 De ha'rs so long an' thick an' strong,—des fit fur banjo-stringin';
 Dat nigger shaved 'em off as short as wash-day-dinner graces;
 An' sorted ob 'em by de size, from little E's to basses.

He strung her, tuned her, struck a jig—'t wuz "Nebber min'
 de wedder,"—
 She soun' like forty-lebben bands a-playin' all togedder;
 Some went to pattin' some to dancin': Noah called de figgers—
 An' Ham he sot an' knocked de tune, de happiest ob niggers!

Now, sence dat time—it's mighty strange—dere's not de
 slighes' showin'
 Ob any ha'r at all upon de 'possum's tail a-growin';
 An' curi's, too,—dat nigger's ways: his people nebber los' 'em—
 Fur whar you finds de nigger—dar's de banjo an' de 'possum!⁹

OLD NOAH

Go way, old fiddle
 People is tired of your squawking!
 Come listen to your better;
 Don't you hear the banjo talking?

It's about the possum's tail,
 I'll let you ladies listen—
 Whilst the hair it is not there,
 And why it is so missing.

"It's going to come an overflow,"
 Says old Noah, looking solemn;
 Then he took the Herald,
 And he read the river column.

Then he put his men to work
 Clearing timber patches;

⁹ *Scribner's Monthly Magazine*, XV (January, 1878), pp. 445-448. The account of Noah and the flood is a part of the long poem "Christmas Night in the Quarters," which also includes the chant discussed earlier in this article.

Swore he was going to make a boat,
To beat the steamer Natchez.

Old Noah kept them hewing,
Chopping and sawing;
All the wicked neighbors around
Kept sassing him and jawing.

Old Noah did not miss them,
He knew what was going to happen;
For forty days and forty nights
The rain kept on dropping.

Old Noah got his ark done;
He had to herd his beasts;
And in his show travelling,
He praised his highest beasts.

He herded them into the ark,
Except one Jersey heifer; with her
he had to battle;
But he got her safe into the ark,
When he heard the thunder rattle.

The rain it struck to pouring down
So burdently and heavy,
The river rose immediately
And bursted through the levees.

The ark it-just kept sailing,
Sailing and sailing;
The lion he got his dander up
And bursted through the railing.

Then Sam, our only nigger
Was sailing in the package,
Got lonesome in the barber shop
And couldn't stand the racket.

He thought he would amuse himself,
He steamed some wood and bent it;
So soon he had a banjo made,
But at first he did not mean it.

He wet the leather, stretched it on,
Made bridges, screws, and aprons;
He fit it to a proper neck,
Which was very long and tapering.

Of course the possum he is here,
 Just as fine as I am singing;
 The hide on the possum's tail
 Will do for the banjo stringing.

He took the hide, he shaved it out,
 From little east to graces;
 He tuned her up, he strung her up,
 From little e to basses.

He tuned her up and struck a jig,
 Saying, "Never mind the weather!"
 He sounded like eleven banjos,
 Playing all together.

Some got to patting, some got to dancing,
 Old Noah called the figure;
 But the happiest man in our crowd
 Was Sam, our only nigger.¹⁰

As pointed out by Professor Reed Smith, who has called attention to the similarity of these two poems, here is a case that "shows how easy it is for an individual-author version to float off into oral tradition and be taken over by the people."¹¹ According to the introduction under the title, the West Virginia ballad, "Old Noah," passed from mouth to ear, from singer to listener in the conventional manner of the old folk ballads; however, it is not likely that this ballad originated in West Virginia. The background and atmosphere are not of West Virginia. Indications are that it was first brought into print by Irwin Russell in 1878. It is quite possible that it circulated as a tale among Negroes living near the Mississippi river. The names and places mentioned in both versions establish the locale in this vicinity. In Russell's time this was a long distance from West Virginia. The old Negro's conception of the flood was gained from his acquaintance with a Mississippi river flood. The word "overflow" in the third stanza of "Old Noah" is used instead of the word "flood" because it is more closely associated with a stream or a river overflowing its banks. The word "Herald," used in both versions, is no doubt a reference to the *Vicksburg Herald*, a well-known newspaper published in nearby Vicksburg during Russell's time. The river column was eagerly read from day to day during the flood season.

¹⁰ Cox, *op. cit.*, pp. 508-509.

¹¹ Reed Smith, *South Carolina Ballads* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928), p. 47.

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The *Natchez* was a famous Mississippi river steamboat known for its race with the *Robert E. Lee*.¹² The "levees," mentioned in the ninth stanza of the West Virginia version and in the fifth stanza of Russell's poem, refer to the levees maintained along the banks of the Mississippi to prevent flooding of the delta areas. The word "package" in the eleventh stanza is "packet" in Russell's poem. A "packet," which is the correct term, is a particular kind of river boat used for carrying passengers and mail. Furthermore, it rimes better with "racket" in the same stanza, as was no doubt originally intended. These terms, familiar to people in the vicinity of Port Gibson, are not of West Virginia flavor. A careful reading of the two versions will indicate that Russell's is the more original and superior. The uniformity and accuracy of details in terminology and dialect indicate it to be the work of a conscious artist rather than the composite work of a number of people. Furthermore, Russell's version carries the story to its conclusion by calling attention to the 'possum's tail being bare and to the fact that the "nigger" and the 'possum are both still to be found in the same vicinity. Here, no doubt, was a folk story that was circulating among members of the Negro race and that was first put into verse by Russell.

Another interesting parallel concerns Russell's "Half-Way Doin's" and "A Sermon for the Sisters." In April, 1876, *Scribner's Monthly Magazine* published "Half-Way Doin's," and in April, 1879, in the same magazine, "Sermon for the Sisters" made its appearance. The first stanza of "A Sermon for the Sisters" and all of "Half-Way Doin's" were published by Professor Thomas W. Talley in a book called *Negro Folk Rhymes—Wise and Otherwise* (1922) under the titles, "Fed from the Tree of Knowledge" and "Half Way Doings." The texts of the four poems are as follows:

A SERMON FOR THE SISTERS

Irwin Russell

I NEBBER breaks a colt afore he's old
enough to trabbel;
I nebbber digs my taters tell dey plenty
big to grabble.
An' when you sees me risin' up to
structify in meetin',

¹²Russell mentions the *Robert E. Lee* in his poem, "Precepts at Parting."

I's fust clumb up de knowledge-tree an'
done some apple-eatin'.¹³

FED FROM THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

Thomas W. Talley

I NEBBER starts to break my colt,
Till he's ole enough to trabble.
I nebbber digs my taters up
W'en deys only right to grabble.
So w'en you sees me risin' up
To structify in meetin',
You can know I'se climbed de Knowledge Tree
An' done some apple eatin'.¹⁴

HALF-WAY DOIN'S

Irwin Russell

Belubbed fellah-trabblers:—In holdin' forth to-day,
I doesn't quote no special verse fur whut I has to say;
De Sermon will be berry short, an' dis here am de tex':
Dat half-way doin's ai'nt no 'count fur dis worl' or de nex'.

Dis worl' dat we's a-libbin' in is like a cotton-row,
Whar ebery cullud gentleman has got his line to hoe;
An' ebery time a lazy nigger stops to take a nap,
De grass keeps on a-growin' fur to smudder up his crap.

When Moses led de Jews acrost de waters ob de sea,
Dey had to keep a-goin' jes as fas' as fas' could be;
Do yo s'pose dat dey could ebber hab succeeded in deir wish,
An' reached de Promised Lan' at las'—if dey had stopped to fish?

My frien's, dar wuz a garden once, whar Adam libbed wid Eve,
Wid no one 'roun' to bodder dem, no neighbors fur to thieve;
An' ebery day wuz Christmas, an' dey got their rations free,
An' eberyting belong to dem except an apple-tree.

You all know 'bout de story—how de snake come snoopin' 'roun',
A stump-tail rusty moccasin, a-crawlin' on de groun',—
How Eve an' Adam ate de fruit an' went an' hid deir face,
Till de angel oberseer, he come an' drove 'em off de place.

¹³ *Scribner's Monthly Magazine*, XVII (April, 1879), p. 918. Only the first stanza is given here.

¹⁴ Thomas W. Talley, *Negro Folk Rhymes—Wise and Otherwise* (New York, Macmillan Company, 1922), p. 212.

Now, s'pose dat man an' 'ooman had n't 'tempted fur to shirk,
But had gone about deir gardenin', an' 'tended to deir work,
Dey would n't hab been loafin' whar dey had no business to,
An' de debbil nebber'd got a chance to tell 'em whut to do.

No half-way doin's, bredren! It'll nebber do, I say!
Go at your task an' finish it, an' den's de time to play;
Fur eben if de crap is good, de rain'll spile the bolls,
Unless you keeps a-pickin' in de garden ob yo' souls.

Keep a-plowin', an' a-hoein', an' a-scrapin' ob de rows,
An' when de ginnin's ober you can pay up whut you owes;
But if you quits a-workin' ebery time de sun is hot,
De sheriff's gwine to lebbly upon ebery'ting you's got.

Whuteber 'tis you's dribin' at, be shore an' dribe it through,
An' don't let nuffin stop you, but do whut you's gwine to do;
Fur when you sees a nigger foolin', den, as shore's you're born,
You's gwine to see him comin' out de small end ob de horn.

I thanks you for de 'tention you has gib dis afternoon—
Sister Williams¹⁵ will oblige us by a'raisin' ob a tune—
I see dat Brudder Johnson's 'bout to pass aroun' de hat,
An' don't let's hab no half-way doin's when it comes to dat!¹⁶

HALF WAY DOINGS

Thomas W. Talley

My dear Brudders an' sisters,
As I comes here to-day,
I ain't gwineter take no scripture verse
For what I'se gwineter say.

My words I'se gwineter cut off short
An' I 'spects to use dis tex':
"Dis half way doin's hain't no count
Fer dis worl' nor de nex'."

Dis half way doin's, Brudderin,
Won't never do, I say.
Go to yo' wuk, an' git it done,
An' den's de time to play.

¹⁵ In one of his conversations with Mrs. Maggie Taylor and Mrs. Sallie Englesing (formerly the Misses Williams of Port Gibson, Miss.), referred to in footnote no. 7, the writer of this article was told that Russell, in fun, used the name "Williams" here. Miss Sallie Williams was about ten years younger than Russell, and in a play on one occasion she played the role of an old Negro cook, Lucy Gilbert, wife of Uncle Billy, a part played by Russell.

¹⁶ *Scribner's Monthly Magazine* XI (April, 1876), p. 760.

Fer we'n a Nigger gits lazy,
 An' stops to take short naps,
 De weeds an' grass is shore to grow
 An' smudder out his craps.

Dis worl' dat we's a livin' in
 Is sumpen lake a cotton row:
 Whar each an' ev'ry one o' us
 Is got his row to hoe.

An' w'en de cotton's all laid by,
 De rain, it spile de bowls,
 If you don't keep busy pickin'
 In de cotton fiel' of yo' souls.

Keep on a-plowin', an' a-hoein';
 Keep on scrapin' off de rows;
 An w'en de year is over
 You can pay off all you owes.

But w'en you sees a lazy Nigger
 Stop workin', shore's you're born,
 You'se gwineter see him comin' out
 At de liddle end of de horn.¹⁷

Professor Talley, who retired several years ago from teaching English at Fisk University, a school for Negroes in Nashville, Tenn., states, "I learned the Negro folk rhymes, 'Fed from the Tree of Knowledge' and 'Half Way Doings,' from ex-slaves more than sixty years ago in Bedford County, Tennessee, where I was born."¹⁸ According to dates of publication Russell could not have drawn from Professor Talley; and on the other hand, although he must have been rather young at the time he learned these folk rhymes, Professor Talley's statement is acceptable. The similarities in these poems are most striking when one considers the fact that Russell published his poems seventy-one and seventy-four years ago and that these two writers lived in different states and some distance apart. The poems are very similar in many details. The principal differences are the greater length and the completeness of Russell's versions. It is quite possible that both men learned these rhymes directly from a common source, the folk material of ex-slaves over an area including both Bedford County, Tennessee, and Claiborne County, Mississippi.

¹⁷ Thomas W. Talley, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

¹⁸ This statement is taken from a letter written by Professor Talley to the writer of this article, dated January 14, 1940.

It also seems possible that here are more instances of Russell's poems floating off into oral tradition.

Russell's interest in the folk material of his vicinity is evident in much of his work. Like Burns, the poet he most admired, he was interested in the language, the incidents, and folk tales that were current among humble people. He made much use of the stanza form and the narrative technique of the traditional ballad. Professor Pattee has stated that Russell's poems "undoubtedly had been influenced by the Pike County balladry, and yet were so fresh and original in material and manner that they in turn became a strong influence on their times."¹⁹ The folk nature of his dialect poems as characterized by the dramatic incident, the rapidly moving narrative, and the aphoristic style of the loquacious Negro indicates that much of Russell's material was drawn directly from the ex-slaves of his vicinity. Russell himself states, "I have lived long enough among the negroes (as also long enough away from them) to appreciate their peculiarities, understand their character, disposition, language, customs and habits."²⁰ These are the things that the poem has recorded.

University of Mississippi

¹⁹ Fred Lewis Pattee, *A History of American Literature Since 1870* (New York: The Century Company, 1917), p. 86.

²⁰ Charles C. Marble, "Irwin Russell," *The Critic*, X (1888), 199.

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FOOLISH JOHN TALES FROM THE FRENCH FOLKLORE OF LOUISIANA¹

by

Calvin Claudel

The character Foolish John is very old in world folklore, and he seems to have taken particularly firm root in Louisiana.² He represents a combination of the country bumpkin and village idiot, doing things *à tort et à travers*. He is good natured but feeble-minded. "Putting out the light" to him means "throwing it out the window." Sometimes he may show an inarticulate wisdom by some round-about process, but such occasions are rare. He never gets on in life like the clever individual who understands nuances of meaning which govern his behavior. He always interprets words and situations in their perversely literal sense. The verbs "to milk" and "to shoot" are the same word in Louisiana French, *tirer*. Thus when his mother tells him to go milk the cow, he goes to shoot her. He is an unwitting sadist. He burns his grandmother to death to keep her warm, and thinks she is smiling with contentment when her teeth show after she is roasted to a crisp. He is kind to inanimate objects. He will bundle up a tree to keep it warm, grease a cracked up and drying mud-hole to relieve its chapped condition and will give money and clothes to a lifeless statue because it does not contradict him as other people do.

As pointed out in the tale analysis, Foolish John is a very old comic character. The mother acts as a kind of puppeteer, setting her stupid son in motion, and as a kind of foil, serving to bring out his comic behavior. Sometimes Wise John will be set next to Foolish John in somewhat the same way. In presenting the boob character, setting him next to a common-sense person, we see the working of an old dramatic procedure. We see it today in the movies. For instance, Abbott and Costello have this relation to each other, the former as a foil to bring out the latter's comic behavior. This is

¹ The material for this article comes from the author's dissertation: "A Study of Louisiana French Folktales in Avoyelle Parish" (Unpublished Doctor's dissertation, Department of Romance Languages and Literatures, University of North Carolina, 1947). The texts are translations of dialect tales recorded during the summer of 1944 at Louisiana State University from informants of Avoyelles Parish. Each tale bears a number, the informant's name and age, as listed on the phonograph disks which are in the author's possession.

² See Calvin Claudel, *SFQ*, VIII (1944), 287-299 and Marie Thériot and Marie LaHaye, *SFQ*, VII (1943), 153-156.

true, too, of Laurel and Hardy. The radio puppet characters Charlie McCarthy and Mortimer Snerd of Edgar Bergen are somewhat comparable.

Following the translated texts of the tales, a study or analysis is made of each tale, preceded by a list of the motives as found in Aarne-Thompson and relevant bibliographical references. The fourth tale is taken from Miss Corinne Saucier's collection.³ It is included because it illustrates particularly well Foolish John's role as the doltish errand boy.

FOOLISH JOHN TALES

1. FOOLISH JOHN AND THE SUPPER

Communicated by Mrs. A. E. Claudel, Avoyelles Parish, Louisiana

Once there was a fellow named Foolish John. It happened that there was a big supper being given by some well-to-do folk. Foolish John was preparing to go with a comrade of his, who said, "You realize, I suppose, that you must not eat too much. Those are fine people, and you know yourself how you like to eat, Foolish John."

"How am I going to know when I have enough?"

"Well, I'll tell you what—I'll step on your foot; I'll bear down hard on it when you have enough."

"Well," replied Foolish John, "that's fine."

So when the time came, they went to supper. Everyone got set to eat, taking his place at the table and serving himself. There were all kinds of good things. There was gumbo and rice, mush and milk, in fact lots of food.

Foolish John had served himself a plateful of food. Just then a dog passed by under the table stepping on his foot. He had taken only two or three mouthfuls, then suddenly laid down his knife and fork on his plate. He crossed them well and left them there. The master of the household would pass him a dish, and Foolish John would say, "No, thanks. I have enough."

Everyone said, "Why, that can't possibly be! You haven't eaten enough already, have you?"

"Oh yes, I've already eaten enough. I don't want anything more. Thanks."

³ Corinne Lelia Saucier, *Louisiana Folktales and Songs in French Dialect, with Linguistic Notes* (Unpublished Master's Thesis, Department of Modern Languages, George Peabody College, 1923), no. X.

Eh! Everybody ate and ate, finally getting up from the table. Poor Foolish John had eaten nothing.

When bedtime came, they all went to bed. Foolish John said to his friend, "How is it you pressed on my foot so soon like that, to keep me from eating? You were still eating; I had stopped."

"Well, I'll tell you what—go in back, to the kitchen. I saw where they put some mush in a big jar, a jarful. You can go eat it."

"That's fine," said Foolish John.

So he left to go eat some mush from the jar. He began eating, eating. He finally said to himself, "I must go bring some to my friend in the room there."

He went to give some mush to his comrade. Meanwhile there was one of the girls asleep in the nearby room. Foolish John made a mistake and went into the girl's room instead of his friend's. The girl was lying in the bed sort of like a rainbow. Her nightgown was all tucked up. He got close and said,

"Here, taste this fine mush." It was pretty dark in the room. "Taste!" he repeated. The girl was going, *pouf, pouf*. "Why, don't blow! It's not hot! . . . I'll let you have it in the face if you don't stop blowing!" Meanwhile the girl herself was breaking wind. "Stop that! don't blow, I tell you it's not hot." *Pouf, pouf!* "Why, I'm going to throw it at you!" *Pow!* He threw it at the girl and left. She got up, began crying, "Mama, O mama! I have messed in the bed! . . . My supper didn't agree with me!"

All this while Foolish John was in the kitchen again. The old lady said to her daughter,

"Go wash yourself off in the hole outside in the yard, over there in the duck pond! That's all I can tell you to do."

The girl went and began washing herself there where the ducks bathed.

Foolish John began eating again. He finally got his two hands caught in the jar. He could not get them out anymore. He left, went where his friend was and said, "I got my two hands caught in this jar. How am I going to get by hands out of there, I have no idea?"

"Well, I'll tell you what you can do. There is a stump outside there. Go break the jar on that stump. That's the best thing for you to do."

So Foolish John left to break the jar upon the stump. He walked toward the pond with his two hands stuck inside. He saw the girl stooping. He thought it was a stump. He let her have it, *pang!*—the jar across her head. The poor girl fell upon her back in the mud hole

and began screaming, "O Papa! I won't do it anymore!"

Just then the old man got up, calling out, "What's the matter?"

The ducks and guineas were all making a big fuss by then. The hens were cackling, the geese screaming. Every barnyard creature on the place was running wild around the yard.

Foolish John understood he had done something that was not right. He got up, took to running and went into the house. He pulled loose a door and put it over his head, leaving with it. He walked on until he reached the woods, climbing into a tree with his door still upon his head. He knew where there were thieves, some giants, who went to count their money every time they made a robbery. They would go there into the woods to rest and divide the money under this tree. The thieves came. They began to count their money, "This is for me, that's for you. This is for me, that's for you . . ."

"And me-eee!"

"Why, listen! What's that anyway? a devil? It's the devil after us!"

They began to count again, "This is for me, that's for you . . ."

"And me-eee!"

"Well, I'm sure, you all; it's the devil."

One was cleaning his teeth with his knife. What does Foolish John do but let the door fall. While it was coming down, the thief who was picking his teeth cut off his tongue. They all left, leaving behind the money they had stolen. The one who had sliced off his tongue meant to say, "Wait for me!" but would only go, "A-a-a-a-a!" They kept shouting, "Listen to the devil coming! Listen to the devil coming!"

So Foolish John got down from the tree and picked up all the money. He put it inside his shirt and left. In the end, he was not so foolish as all that. He came out rich in the long run.

This tale is a fusion of tale type 1775:¹ The hungry parson (numskull) and tale type 1653: The robbers under the tree. It consists, in this order of motives J 1750:² Absurd misunderstandings; X 451: The hungry parson (numskull) gets his head (hands)

¹ Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson, *The Types of the Folk-Tale*, (FF Communications, No. 74; Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1928).

² Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (FF Communications, Nos. 105-109, 116-117; Helsinki, 1932-1936).

caught in the porridge pot (mush jar); K 2520: Deception by frightening; K 335.1.1: Door falls on robbers from tree, and they flee, leaving money.

Other variants, not cited in the above indices and significant in evaluating the Avoyelles text, are Parsons, pp. 206-209, no. 219 (Antilles French);³ Andrade, pp. 32-35, nos. 7-9 (Dominican Spanish); Claudel, *SFQ* VIII (1944), 287-299, also Thériot and LaHaye, *SFQ*, VII (1943), 153-156 (Louisiana French); Carrière, pp. 304-306, no. 70, and pp. 300-302, no. 68 (Missouri French); compare Fortier, pp. 63-68, no. 18; Cosquin, II, 177-183, no. 22, and I, 108-120, 237-245; Thompson, *The Folktale*, pp. 190-196, p. 199.

The fusion of these two tales resulted from the fact that both types deal with the numskull character. The main plot or *dénouement* is found in the second part. The motives leading up to it may vary considerably, but the principal theme remains fairly stable. While both types have wide currency, the second is generally more prevalent, being found in almost all areas where folklore has been collected. It occurs in European, African, and Asiatic countries, likewise in America and adjacent islands. Variants are found in such widespread areas as the Philippines and Indonesia.

The central character of these tales, as already pointed out, is the slow-witted, literal-minded blunderer who may be named Jack or Jock in English-speaking countries, *Jean Sot* in French, *Juan Bobo* or *Juan Sonso* in Spanish. Sometimes the scapegoat animal character named *Bouqui* in Louisiana interchanges role with Foolish John, such as in the grandmother burning episode. The wide currency of this particular tale may be attributed to the universal popularity of the dolt type.

The motive of the door and the robbers under the tree is quite current and varies little. In almost every version the boob tears a door off its hinges, gets out with it and finally climbs a tree, marking the spot of the robbers' rendezvous for dividing the loot, which inevitably comes into the fool's possession after the dropping or falling of the door and the flight of the robbers. In most versions we see the fool climb the tree with a wise-friend who acts as a foil for Foolish John. Before dropping the door, the fool lodges his own excrement in the pot in which the robbers are cooking their meal under the tree, which they gratefully take to be "salad and lemonade" or "butter and water." There are variants of the door-dropping

³ Consult bibliographical key at end of this article for complete information on these sources.

motives. The boob may drop the body of an animal, a window, or chain on the robbers.

Parsons lists for the Antilles fifteen variants of type 1653 (The robbers under the tree) and none of type 1775 (The hungry parson or numskull). Among these fifteen variants, those from Martinique and Haiti follow more closely the Avoyelles tale, except that in all cases Foolish John is associated to the very end with his opposite—John Smart, Little John, or the like.

The Dominican variants resemble the Avoyelles tale very closely, having both types fused together in similar manner.

The Missouri versions show interesting variations. In the tale "Big Eater"⁴ we have the essential motives leading up to the bedroom episode. Big Eater and his friend are invited to the king's place for supper. The next morning the king finds his daughter bruised and cut and Good Eater's friend covered with mush. The friend is put in jail and finally freed, through an explanation. In the tale of "John the Stupid and John the Wise"⁵ there are the usual errand episodes, found in Avoyelles tales nos. 2, 3 and 4. When John the Stupid burns his mother to death, John the Wise on his return tells him that they had better flee. John the Stupid takes the door along, and the same motives follow as in the Avoyelles text.

Cosquin gives the identical plot leading up to the supper but does not include *fabliaux*-like bedroom scene.

These episodes about the numskull at mealtime, the wrenched-off door and the treasure that is either found or lost by him, seem to go far back to Buddhistic lore. We find a germ of this tale in Somadeva's *Katha Sarit Sagara* in the "Story of the Fool who was nearly choked with rice,"⁶ and the "Story of the Thirsty Fool that did not drink."⁷ We also have evidence of the wrenched-off door theme in the "Story of the Servant who looked after the door."⁸

In some cases the dolt's role is taken by a stupid wife,⁹ as seen in some French variants. In Saint Louis I heard from Mr. Joseph Hoffman, of Hungarian descent, a tale involving a female variant of Foolish John, entitled, "The Foolish wife and the treasure." A

⁴ Carrière, pp. 304-306, no. 70.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 300-302, no. 68.

⁶ C. H. Tawney and N. M. Penzer, *The Ocean of Story* (Being a Translation of Somadeva's *Katha Sarit Sagara*, 10 vols.; London: Chas. J. Sawyer, 1924). V, 135-136, no. 137.

⁷ *Ibid.*, V, 88, no. 106.

⁸ *Ibid.*, V, 117, no. 28.

⁹ Cosquin I, 108-120.

Hungarian peasant hid a pot of gold coins in his backyard. His foolish wife chanced upon it. Thinking it was a pot of old bones, she exchanged the old pot for a new one with a peddler passing by. When the husband returned, he inquired about the new pot. She told him the story. The husband started running to overtake the peddler, his wife following behind him. Finally she began calling him and telling him to wait. The husband returned to find his wife stooping, saying she had to take time out to urinate. Thus the peddler gets away.

2. FOOLISH JOHN AND THE ERRANDS

(Variant A)

Communicated by Mrs. A. E. Claudel of Avoyelles Parish, Louisiana

Once there was a woman who had a boy whom she named Foolish John. He was very foolish, backward and stupid.

One day his mother called him, "Foolish John, come here. Go buy me some cotton cloth and thread at the store." He came, she gave him the money and he left to go buy the cloth and thread.

On his return, he saw a little gum tree shaking in the wind. It was cold that day. Eh! the wind was blowing at the tree. It was cold. Foolish John looked and stopped to notice the little gum tree. "Poor little gum tree!" he exclaimed, "I'm sure you are cold. Wait I'll fix you so you won't be cold!"

He took the cloth, wrapping all the little tree with it. He then took the thread, winding it all around so the cloth would not untwist or unwrap.

Then he left for home. When he reached the house, his mother asked, "Where is my cotton cloth?"

"Well, mama," explained he, "I met a poor little gum tree. Indeed it made me feel sorry. It trembled, had a chill and was cold."

"Oh my! Foolish John, a tree does not get cold! My! you're a big boob! You should have brought my cotton and thread to make your shirts."

"Well," said he, "I bundled up the little gum tree with it. It was chilly."

The next day she sent him to the store to buy some lard. On his way back he passed alongside a little pond that had dried up. It was very flat, and where the water had withdrawn it was all cracked up.

Now Foolish John saw this, took the lard and began to grease the cracks by smearing the lard over them with

a little stick. "Poor little pond!" said he, "I'm sure this poor little pond is aching. It is chapped up. Let me grease it well." He greased the little pond well, filling all the cracks with the lard.

He returned home. "Where is my lard?" requested his mother.

"Why," explained he, "I met a little pond, mama. It was all chapped, and I greased it with the lard. I am sure it ached."

"Ah, but you're a big boob!" she cried. "You should have brought my lard to cook supper for you!"

Well, the next day it was something else. "You will go buy me some needles," said she. "I want number seven."

"All right," he replied.

Foolish John left and got the needles when he reached the store. On his return he passed alongside a ditch where there were frogs croaking, "Eight, eight, eight, eight!"

"You're a liar; it's not eight!" shouted Foolish John. "I tell you it's seven!"

"Eight, eight, eight, eight!" croaked the frogs.

"You lie, it's seven! Here, count! Look and you will see for yourself," he said, throwing the needles into the ditch.

The frogs did not return the needles. He stayed standing, waiting. Finally he returned home. "Where are my needles?" asked his mother.

"Well," explained he, "a frog persisted in telling me the needles were size eight. I threw them into the ditch for her to see for herself. The nasty thing never returned them to me!"

"Why, you are a boob!" she screamed. "Frogs croak at night. It's night time now. You should have brought me my needles to do some sewing."

So never, never was the mother able to get any good results out of Foolish John or get him to do anything straight. He was a real foolish John for good.

Now she told Foolish John, "You will go milk the cow this evening."

The mother went into the kitchen to get the milk pail ready. She washed it to give it to Foolish John to milk the cow.

Suddenly she heard the shot of a gun outside—bang! She looked outside, saw the cow limp about, fall over and kick around. "Foolish John!" she yelled. Meanwhile Foolish John had the gun in his hands. "Why, you shot the cow!"

"Why surely, you told me to shoot her for supper. So I shot her."

"Oh my! you've killed the cow! We'll have no more milk now. How will we do now without milk? Ah! it is a misfortune indeed to have around the place someone so stupid!"

[In the Louisiana French, *milk* and *shoot* are the same word *tirer*, the expression that Foolish John used.]

This tale has a series of motives as found in Type 1685: The Foolish bridegroom. It consists, in this order, of motives J 1873.3: Warming the stove (tree) with wool (cotton cloth); J 1873: animals or objects kept warm; J 1875: Objects ascribed human feelings; J 18-71: Filling the cracks with butter (lard); J 1851.1.1: Numskull throws money (needles) to frogs so that they can count it; J 1905: absurd ignorance about milking cows.

Other variants, not cited in the above indices and significant in evaluating the Avoyelles texts are Barbeau and Daviault *JAFL* 1940, LIII, 149-151, no. 20 (Canadian French); Thériot and LaHaye *SFQ* 1943, VII, 153-156 (Louisiana French); Ray *JAFL* 1908, XXI, 362-365 (Louisiana French); Carrière 280-283, no. 63, 300-304, nos. 68-69; compare Lee, 750-759, 241-242.

This tale of Foolish John as the stupid errand boy represents similar motives detached from the larger cycle of tales centered around the theme of the awkwardly foolish bridegroom. As heard in Louisiana variants, his mother tells him to put parsley into the soup while she is gone. Since the dog is named Percy (pronounced like French *persil*, "parsley"), Foolish John puts the poor animal into the scalding soup. She later tells him to see that his grandmother is kept warm and near the fireplace while she is gone. Foolish John ties her to the dog-irons and burns her to death. He mistakes her death grin for a smile of contentment.

In foreign variants when the boob begins courting his girl and makes no headway, his mother tells him to "cast good eyes" at her. He plucks out sheep's eyes and throws them at his bride-to-be. His wedding night is a fiasco when he discovers in bed a he-goat which his bride substituted for herself.

The number of these blundering episodes with reference to Foolish John are countless. In the discussion on the first tale, some of these motives have been pointed out. In other tales he plays the part of the stupid servant or valet. In this role his stupidity

may be feigned in order to cheat his master in a labor contract.¹⁰ The master may be the fool in the character of the stupid ogre.¹¹

The character Foolish John is generally seen as a stupid lad who is the despair of his mother. He suggests an awkward, arrested adolescence. In some tales the mother acts somewhat as a puppeteer, serving only to set her son in action on his blundering exploits. His role is sometimes that of the incorrigibly stupid servant or hired hand who is chased off the place.

Since Foolish John is such a prominent character in everyday life, it was inevitable that he make his way into literature and gain great prominence. In French literature, as early as the sixteenth century, we find the name *Janot* as a synonym for "boob."¹² As a result of the work of Doutrepont on popular types in French literature, we are able to see the great vogue of this type, especially around the end of the eighteenth century and during the early part of the nineteenth, a period when classicism was dead and new genres were sought after.

This type appears in the sixteenth-century Italian and French comedy. Among the Italian comedians, his name is *Zanni*, *Giani*, *Giannino* or *Giannico*; among the French, *Jennicot*, *Janicot*, *Janot*, *Jeannin*, etc. The development of the name of this clown type, who in old comic plays played the part of an awkward simpleton by imitating the other performers with ludicrous failure, is interesting. The Italian *Giovanni* contracted to *Zanni*, giving French *Zani* and English *Zany*. He sometimes plays the part of the simple-minded peasant or valet, speaking a jumbled malaprop language. He is never able to fulfill an errand.¹³

It was not until 1779, in Dorvigny's *Les Battus paient l'amende*¹⁴ that we see Janot arise as a full blown literary type,¹⁵ which was to gain great prominence during France's period of social upheaval. In this play Janot is a doltish shop and errand boy for a second-hand dealer named Ragot. Madame Ragot sends him to buy a leg of mutton and some wine. On the way he meets his sweetheart, Suzon, and accompanies her home, forgetting his errand, as it begins to

¹⁰ Lee, pp. 252-257.

¹¹ Aarne-Thompson, *op. cit.*, pp. 145-148, types 1000-1029.

¹² Doutrepont I, 88.

¹³ *Ibid.*, II, 524.

¹⁴ Louis-Archambault Dorvigny, *Les Battus paient l'amende* (Second edition; Paris: L. Jorry, 1780).

¹⁵ Doutrepont II, 90.

grow dark. From an upstairs window, her father, Simon, empties a chamber pot upon him. Through the advice of his friend Dodinet, he decides to sue Simon. The law clerk cheats him out of his money. In the end Janot is beaten up and has to pay the fine.

The folk type of the inarticulate country bumpkin became the rage of Paris.¹⁶ At the fair theatres, there were hundreds of farces featuring him. His popularity spread all over Europe. All fashionable homes had a porcelain figure of *Jeannot*.

Variant characters of this bob type were La Palisse, Jocrisse, Nicaise, Gribouille, Babylas, Gogo, Calino, etc.¹⁷ In the character of Jocrisse, he is defined as the type "*qui mène les poules pisser*."¹⁸ The Goncourt brothers pointed out the popularity of La Palisse and Calino even in their day, whose roles resemble those of our character Foolish John.¹⁹

3. FOOLISH JOHN AND THE ERRANDS

(Variant B)

Communicated by Juanita Roy, of Avoyelles Parish, Louisiana

Once there was a boy whose name was Foolish John. One day his mother said to him, "Foolish John, go to the village to buy me a jar of vaseline."

Foolish John left. On his way back he was walking upon the pavement. He saw that it was cracked. He thought that the pavement was chapped. So he opened the jar and rubbed the vaseline over the crack. "Well," said he to himself, "the pavement will get well."

When he got home, his mother asked him, "Where is my vaseline, Foolish John?"

"Mama," he explained, "I was coming on the pavement and saw it was cracked and chapped up, so I passed the vaseline over it."

"Oh!" cried she, "Foolish John, how foolish you are! Why did you not bring my vaseline!"

Now two or three days afterward, she said, "Go in the village and get me some lard."

On his way back, he saw a dog that had been knocked down alongside the road. It was suffering. Foolish John saw its cuts and sores. The animal looked as if it

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 87-108.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 523.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, II, 103-105.

¹⁹ Edmond de Goncourt and Jules de Goncourt, *Quelques créatures de ce temps* (Paris: Flammarion, Fasquelle, 1876), 67-75.

had been hit by an automobile. So Foolish John bent over, rubbed the lard over the dog and said, "The dog will get better."

When he reached home, his mother asked, "O Foolish John, where is my lard?"

"Mother," he explained, "I saw a dog lying alongside the road. I passed the lard over the animal, because it was cut. It had lots of sore spots."

"Foolish John!" she cried, "what will I do with you? You are so foolish. You are indeed very stupid!"

Now two or three days later, she told him, "Foolish John, go milk the cow. Then we will eat."

So Foolish John went into the room to get the gun and he shot the cow. When his mother heard the shot of the gun, she came out upon the porch, exclaiming, "O Foolish John, you have shot the cow! What will we do?"

"Why, mama," explained Foolish John, "I thought you told me to go shoot the cow. So I shot her."

"Oh! Foolish John, what a boob you are! We have no more cow now, no more milk!"

(In the Louisiana French that Foolish John and his mother spoke *milk* and *shoot* are the same word—*tirer*.)

This is a close variant of the previous folktale. It consists of Motives J 1871: Filling the cracks with butter (vaseline); J 1905: Absurd ignorance about milking cows.

It is interesting to note that this tale was told by the young informant, Juanita Roy, and shows considerable change in setting and loss of several motives. The tale illustrates urban influence. Foolish John is sent for vaseline instead of lard and greases the cracked pavement of the sidewalk instead of the "chapped" pond. The same motive is repeated, Foolish John is being sent for lard this time, which he uses to grease a dog cut and bruised by the automobile of a hit-and-run driver.

On the "cut-up" dog theme, I heard another variant in Louisiana, though somewhat different, but reminiscent of the "parsley" motive. His mother tells Foolish John to gather up parsley, to be cut and put into the soup. He hacks up the dog Percy and puts him into the boiling soup.

In still another tale, he is told to feather and dress the chickens for the gumbo supper. He plucks the creatures bare, while still alive, and dresses them up in the baby's clothing!

4. FOOLISH JOHN AND THE WASHPOT

Communicated by Manuel Maurace of Avoyelles Parish, Louisiana

Foolish John gave his mother lots of trouble. She sent him to fetch a washpot. He went and was returning with it. He reached a fork in the road. Foolish John says to the pot:

"You see these two roads? Well, both lead to the house." He put the pot on one and he took the other. Foolish John said to the pot, "You have three feet; myself, I have two. "We'll see who gets there first."

When Foolish John reached his mother's place, she asked him where the pot was. He said he had placed it on one road and, himself, he had taken the other, that it had three feet and he thought it could run faster than he. She beat him and sent him back to get the pot. The pot was no longer there. His mama said the neighbor's pot had to be paid for. It cost seven dollars. She gave Foolish John the money, and he left with it.

Along the road he heard springfrogs singing in the pond. The frogs sang, "Little eight, little eight, little eight."

Foolish John says, "You lied! I only have seven!"

The frogs still sang, "Little eight, little eight, little eight." Foolish John asked them to stop it, but they continued. He threw his money into the pond, telling them to count and see if there were not eight dollars.

He returned, and his mama asked him if he had given the money to the neighbor. He said that he had given it to the springfrogs. She beat him again.

One day she sent him to get flour at the neighbor's house. As he was returning with his flour, he came upon an anthill. He said to himself that these poor ants were hungry. So he gave them the flour.

When he reached his mother's, she asked him where the flour was. He said that the poor ants were so hungry, he had given it to them. She beat him.

Next time she sent him to get lard. While returning with the lard, he saw that the ground was cracked up. He put all the lard into the cracks. When he got home, his mama asked him where was the lard. He said he had greased the ground that was chapped, adding it was all cracked up. His mama beat him again.

His mother had a goose that was hatching eggs. Every time Foolish John went by where the goose was, she would cry out and try to peck him. He took a stick and killed her. He was sorry to see the eggs lost; and for fear of his mama, he got the notion of hatching them himself. Now there was some tar in a barrel; so

he tarred himself. Then there were feathers in a box. He got in and rubbed them all over himself. The feathers stuck. He went to sit on the eggs.

His mama saw him. She came with a whip, whipped him, and he fled into the pond, swimming like a goose. Foolish John got another whipping. He ran off, going wild in the woods.

He came back after a couple of years, telling his mother he had found a remedy for their cow that was sick. He said she had to be fed the moss that was growing upon the roof of the house. This stuff was called "pollipot." Foolish John made ladders and scaffolds to get the cow up there. His mama scolded him, telling him he was still *Foolish* John. Next he went to warm himself by the fire. It got too hot. He yelled at the fireplace to move back.

His mama finally abandoned him.¹

Phoenix College

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¹ Translated from the collection of Corinne Lelia Saucier, "Louisiana Folk-Tales and Songs in French Dialects with Linguistic Notes." (Unpublished Master's thesis, Department of French, George Peabody College, 1923), no. 10.

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FOLKLORE NEWS

Southeastern Folklore Society.—SAML A will hold its annual meeting November 26 at Tallahassee with Florida State University as host. The folklore section has accepted the following papers:

"Glimpses of History in Southern Folksongs," A. P. Hudson, University of North Carolina.

"Folklore and Sociology," J. M. MacLachlan, University of Florida.

"Folk Speech in North Carolina," George P. Wilson, The Woman's College of the University of North Carolina.

"The German Cousin of 'Frog Went A'Courting'," George Pullen Jackson, Vanderbilt University.

On Thursday night, November 25, a folklore dinner is being planned. Folklorists are urged to be present and to assure all who may be interested that they will be cordially welcomed.

Tennessee Folklore Society.—E. G. Rogers, Secretary, has announced that the next meeting will be held at George Peabody College for Teachers, Nashville, Tennessee, November 6. Details of the program have not been fully completed, but such personages are expected to appear on the program as Susan B. Riley, Peabody; C. P. Snelgrove, TPI; Stanley Horne, editor, Nashville; Irving Wolfe, Peabody; Paul McConnell, University of the South; Mrs. John Trotwood Moore, State Librarian; and A. L. Crabbe, Peabody.

Ralph S. Boggs during the present academic year will be at the University of Miami, Florida, as a visiting professor of Spanish and lecturer in folklore.

Newman I. White, on a year's leave of absence spent some time in California and is now at Cambridge, Mass.

